

AFC QUARTERLY

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE ASIAN FOOTBALL CONFEDERATION

ISSUE 23

PLUS

**ZUHAIR
BAKHEET**

UAE legend recalls the 1996
AFC Asian Cup on home soil



AFC
CHAMPIONS
LEAGUE 2018

**Quarter-Final
Preview**

Alireza Jahanbakhsh

IR Iran star dreaming of becoming
a continental champion

ISSUE
23

July 2018



NAM TAE-HEE

Al Duhail midfielder looking to follow up a domestic treble in Qatar with AFC Champions League glory.



KEVIN INGRESO

Germany-born Philippines international aiming for continental success with club and country in the months ahead.



MATTHEW JURMAN

Australia defender has set his sights on winning a first AFC Asian Cup title after making a belated international debut last year.

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AFC QUARTERLY

Issue No. 23

July - September 2018

Official quarterly publication of the Asian Football Confederation

Published on behalf of the Asian Football Confederation by Lagardère Sports

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Shaikh Salman Bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa
AFC President



Dear friends,

The excitement of the FIFA World Cup has us all captivated at present and the growing stature of football in Asia is reflected by the records that were broken at the tournament.

Asia had a record number of teams in the tournament and also a record number of officials. The FIFA World Cup has also raised expectations about the AFC Asian Cup which will be held in the United Arab Emirates between January 5 and February 1 next year.

Again, this is a tournament which will set records – for the first time there will be 24 teams competing and every one of the AFC's five regional zones will have at least one team to support at the finals.

The draw took place for the final groups in Dubai – at the iconic Burj Khalifa – on May 4 and it was easy to detect the excitement that was building among the Member Associations, the fans in the UAE, our commercial and broadcast partners and, of course, the media.

And at the draw the AFC was able to announce that the prize money for the tournament would be almost US\$15m – another first for this competition. Completing the list of innovations is a new trophy designed and crafted by London silversmiths Thomas Lyte and a new match ball from the Japanese company Molten.

We have reached the quarter-final stage of the AFC Champions League with two teams from Qatar – Al Duhail and Al Sadd – and two from the Islamic Republic of Iran – Persepolis and Esteghlal – in the West Zone matches. In the East, the Korea Republic pair of Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors and Suwon Samsung Bluewings face each other and China PR's Tianjin Quanjian will play Japan's Kashima Antlers.

In the AFC Cup, Air Force Club of Iraq chase a hat-trick of titles, but they have to overcome Jordan's Al Jazeera and then the Inter-Zone champions from the play-off involving teams from Central, South, ASEAN and East.

The AFC has the AFC U-16 Championship in Malaysia starting in September and the AFC U-19 Championship kicking off in October in Indonesia, as well as qualifying for the AFC Women's U-16, U-19 Championships and Women's Futsal.

The AFC is grateful to all the hosts and congratulates Japan on their outstanding victory in the AFC Women's Asian Cup and to the Jordan FA for staging such an impressive event.

IR Iran returned home to a tumultuous welcome after winning the AFC Women's Futsal title in Thailand and again thanks are due to the Football Association of Thailand. Congratulations to both Japan and IR Iran and good luck to all those teams competing in AFC competitions in the coming months.

Shaikh Salman Bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa
AFC President



At the heart of the image

Gallery



..... Eight In A Row

Al Duhail players and staff rejoiced after winning their eighth successive AFC Champions League game following a 4-1 win over Al Ain in the second leg of the last 16.

Gallery



AFC WOMEN'S ASIAN CUP JORDAN 2018



Asia's Finest

Japan celebrated winning their second successive AFC Women's Asian Cup after defeating Australia 1-0 in the 2018 final at Amman International Stadium in Jordan in April.

Gallery



..... Persepolis Pride

Ahmad Nourollahi beats the Persepolis badge with joy after opening the scoring in his side's 2-1 victory over Al Jazira at Azadi Stadium in May that secured a place in the quarter-finals.

Gallery

Persija Roar

A huge tiger banner was one of many highlights at Persija Jakarta's Gelora Bung Karno Stadium, where a record AFC Cup attendance of 62,198 witnessed their elimination to Home United in May.



Qatar And IR Iran Giants To Clash In Quarter-Finals

THE DRAW FOR THE QUARTER-FINALS OF THE 2018 AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE HAS THROWN UP FOUR INTRIGUING TIES WITH NO FEWER THAN FOUR FORMER CONTINENTAL CHAMPIONS SET TO TAKE TO THE STAGE.

Qatar meets the Islamic Republic of Iran in the quarter-finals of the AFC Champions League as Al Duhail face Persepolis and Al Sadd take on Esteghlal following May's draw in Kuala Lumpur. Al Duhail have been in superb form on the continent, having won all eight of their games, including an 8-3 aggregate victory over three-time finalists Al Ain in the Round of 16. One more win would see the Qatari side match Ulsan Hyundai's record nine in a row set in 2012. Up next are 2017 semi-finalists Persepolis, who overcame Al Jazira in the last 16, with the first leg to be played in Doha and the return meeting at Tehran's Azadi Stadium.

Quarter-Final Draw	
27/08/18 & 17/09/18	Esteghlal vs Al Sadd
28/08/18 & 18/09/18	Al Duhail vs Persepolis
28/08/18 & 18/09/18	Kashima Antlers vs Tianjin Quanjian
29/08/18 & 19/09/18	Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors vs Suwon Samsung Bluewings

Al Sadd were the last team from West Asia to be crowned continental champions, while Esteghlal are aiming to advance to only their second semi-final in the competition.

In the East, two-time champions Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors face an all-Korea Republic clash with domestic rivals Suwon Samsung Bluewings, while tournament debutants Tianjin Quanjian's reward for ousting fellow Chinese side Guangzhou Evergrande is a date with Japan's Kashima Antlers. The first legs of the quarter-finals will be played between August 27 and 29, with the return fixtures taking place from September 17 to 19. The semi-finals will also be played on a home-and-away basis, with the first legs held on October 2 and 3 followed by the second legs on October 23 and 24. East Asia will host the first leg of the final on November 3 before the 2018 AFC Champions League winner will be crowned in West Asia a week later on November 10.



Defending Champions To Face Jordan's Al Jazeera

IRAQ'S AIR FORCE CLUB WILL PLAY AL JAZEERA IN THE AFC CUP WEST ASIA ZONAL FINAL, WHILE HOME UNITED OF SINGAPORE AND THE PHILIPPINES' CERES NEGROS FACE A REPEAT OF THE 2017 ASEAN ZONAL FINAL.

Defending AFC Cup champions Air Force Club will come up against Jordan's Al Jazeera for the third time in this year's competition when the sides meet in the two-legged West Asia Zonal final in September and October. Air Force Club have beaten India's JSW Bengaluru and Tajikistan's FC Istiklol in the previous two finals and remain unbeaten on their quest for an unprecedented third successive title. Having twice drawn with Al Jazeera in the group stage, the pair will meet again after the Jordanian team defeated domestic rivals Al Faisaly and the holders ousted Lebanon's Al Ahed in the West Asia

Knockout Stage Draw	
ASEAN Zonal Final	01/08/18 & 08/08/18
Ceres Negros vs Home United	Inter-Zone Semi-Final
21/08/18 & 28/08/18	
Ceres Negros/Home United vs 4.25 SC	22/08/18 & 29/08/18
JSW Bengaluru vs Altyr Asyr	West Asia Zonal Final
18/09/18 & 02/10/18	
Al Jazeera vs Air Force Club	

sides who are battling it out for continental glory.

First up, Ceres Negros and Home United will meet in a repeat of the 2017 ASEAN Zonal final, from which the Filipino side advanced. The pair also met twice in the group stage with the Singaporean team claiming four points from the two games. The victor will then face East Asia Zonal champions 4.25 SC of DPR Korea in the Inter-Zone semi-finals as the Pyongyang side return to the knockout rounds for the second successive year. In the second Inter-Zone semi-final, South Asia Zonal champions JSW Bengaluru will take on Turkmenistan's Altyr Asyr, who are competing in the knockout rounds for the first time. The winners of the Inter-Zone semi-finals then face off in the two-legged Inter-Zone final on September 19 and October 3, before the final takes place on October 27.

Tough Draw For U-16 Holders

The defending champions Iraq will face former winners Korea Republic, Australia and debutants Afghanistan in Group D of the AFC U-16 Championship in Malaysia after the draw took place at AFC House in April. Iraq defeated neighbours Islamic Republic of Iran on penalties after a scoreless

draw in the 2016 final in Goa, India, to lift the title for the first time.

After failing to get beyond the group stage in 2016, two-time winners Korea Republic will be looking to return to the form of 2014 when they reached the final in a year that also saw Australia progress to the semi-final.

Afghanistan, meanwhile, will be making their first appearance at the competition after claiming wins against Kyrgyz Republic, Lebanon and Bhutan in qualifying.

Elsewhere, hosts Malaysia will line up in Group A alongside a pair of former winners in Japan and Thailand, as well as Tajikistan, who return for the first time since 2010.

Malaysia reached the quarter-finals in 2014 but exited at the group stage in 2016, while two-time champions Japan reached the semi-

finals two years ago before being eliminated by Iraq.

Thailand won the competition in 1998 but fell at the group stage last time. Tajikistan, meanwhile, finished third in 2006 in what was their best performance.

Semi-finalists in 2016, DPR Korea won the AFC U-16 Championship in 2010 and 2014, and the East Asians have been drawn in Group B with Oman, Yemen and Jordan.

Oman were crowned champions in 1996 and 2000, while Yemen finished as runners-up in 2002. Jordan are returning for the first time since reaching the quarter-finals in 2010.

Finally, Iran will square off against Vietnam, India and Indonesia in Group C. Iran won the competition in 2008 and they beat the Vietnamese in the quarter-finals en route to finishing as runners-up in 2016.

India's best performance remains a quarter-final appearance in 2002, while Indonesia finished fourth back in 1990 and return for the first time since 2010.

The opening match will be held on September 20, with the final taking place on October 7. The four semi-finalists will qualify for the 2019 FIFA U-17 World Cup in Peru.



Group A	Malaysia, Japan, Thailand, Tajikistan
Group B	DPR Korea, Oman, Yemen, Jordan
Group C	IR Iran, Vietnam, India, Indonesia
Group D	Iraq, Korea Republic, Australia, Afghanistan

AFC U-19 Championship Contenders Learn Opponents

Hosts Indonesia have been drawn in Group A of the 2018 AFC U-19 Championship alongside the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Chinese Taipei following the draw in May. Indonesia won the competition back in 1961 and have twice finished as runners-up, but have not progressed

beyond the group stage since 1978. The Southeast Asians return after missing out two years ago in Bahrain.

The UAE were crowned champions in 2008 and will be looking to better their 2016 performance when they were eliminated at the group stage, while Qatar won the 2014 edition but also fell at the group stage last time. Chinese Taipei, meanwhile, are participating for the first time since 1974.

Defending champions Japan will line up in Group B where they will face Iraq, Thailand and DPR Korea.

After finishing as runners-up six times, Japan finally got their hands on the trophy in 2016 after defeating Saudi Arabia on penalties in the final.

Five-time winners Iraq last tasted U-19 glory in 2000 when they defeated Japan in the final, while DPR Korea have three titles to their name and Thailand two meaning all four teams in Group B have been crowned champions.

The competition's most successful team, Korea Republic, are up against Australia, Jordan and Vietnam in Group C.

Having won the AFC U-19 Championship 12 times, the East Asians are way out in front in terms of titles lifted but fell at the group stage in 2016.

Australia were also eliminated at the group stage two years ago and their best performance remains a runners-up finish in 2010.

Vietnam were among the success stories in 2016 after reaching the semi-finals, while Jordan are appearing for the first time since 2012.

In Group D, 2016 runners-up Saudi Arabia have been paired alongside China, Malaysia and Tajikistan.

The Saudis have twice won the title, while China also have one championship to their name. Malaysia have finished as runners-up three times but have not appeared since 2006 and Tajikistan will be looking to at least match their quarter-final showing of two years ago.

The AFC U-19 Championship kicks off on October 18 and the final takes place a little over two weeks later on November 4. The four semi-finalists will also advance to the 2019 FIFA U-20 World Cup in Poland.



Group A	Indonesia, UAE, Qatar, Chinese Taipei
Group B	Japan, Iraq, Thailand, DPR Korea
Group C	Korea Republic, Australia, Jordan, Vietnam
Group D	Saudi Arabia, China, Malaysia, Tajikistan



Asian Sides In Record Points Tally At FIFA World Cup

JAPAN REACHED THE LAST 16 AT THE FIFA WORLD CUP AND THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN, KOREA REPUBLIC AND SAUDI ARABIA ALL SECURED WINS AS ASIA'S REPRESENTATIVES CLAIMED A RECORD NUMBER OF POINTS.

Japan equaled their best ever performance at the FIFA World Cup as the East Asians qualified for the Round of 16 for the third time in five editions of the tournament, before elimination to Belgium.

The East Asians got off to the perfect start in Group H as Yuya Osako netted a second-half winner against 10-man Colombia to seal a shock 2-1 victory, before Keisuke Honda's fourth FIFA World Cup goal secured a 2-2 draw with Senegal.

Japan then lost 1-0 to Poland but edged into the next round, before Genki Haraguchi and Takashi Inui put them two up against Belgium. It was not to be, though, as after the Belgians clawed the game back, Nacer Chadli netted the winner with virtually the last kick of the game.

Saudi Arabia became the first Asian side to take part in the FIFA World Cup's opening game but lost 5-0 to Russia in Group A, before an improved performance in a 1-0 defeat to Uruguay.

The Green Falcons rounded off the tournament with what was their third win in the competition as Salem Al Dawsari struck at the death to claim a 2-1 win over Egypt. Iran began with a last-gasp 1-0 victory over Morocco in Group B and then pushed Spain all the way with a strong showing in a 1-0 defeat.

Needing to beat Portugal to guarantee qualification, Karim Ansarifard equalised in stoppage time before Mehdi Taremi missed a gilt-edged opportunity as Team Melli exited having gained many plaudits.

Australia were edged out 2-1 by France in their opening Group C match but rebounded

well to claim a 1-1 draw with Denmark after Mile Jedinak levelled from the spot.

The Socceroos were unable to claim the win they needed in their final group game against Peru as a 2-0 loss meant they were eliminated at the first hurdle.

Finally, Korea Republic saved their best until last after beginning their Group F campaign with back-to-back defeats to Sweden and Mexico.

But, playing against Germany in their final group game, the Taeguk Warriors stunned the world as Kim Young-gwon and Son Heung-min scored in added time to claim a 2-0 win and oust Germany in the first round for the first time since 1938.

In total, the Asian sides gained a record 15 points, one more than the tallies recorded in 2002 and 2010 in a strong showing on the global stage.

PERSIAN PRIDE

HAVING FINISHED THE SEASON AS THE TOP SCORER IN THE NETHERLANDS' EREDIVISIE, ALIREZA JAHANBAKHSI IS FAST ESTABLISHING HIMSELF AS A STAR IN EUROPE. THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN FORWARD WAS PART OF A SIDE THAT WON MANY PLAUDITS AT THE FIFA WORLD CUP AND HE NOW HAS HIS EYES SET ON THE AFC ASIAN CUP TITLE.

By: Paul Williams **Photos:** Lagardère Sports/Getty Images





Alireza Jahanbakhsh lives to play football. Born in Qazvin to the manager of a local bicycle factory and a stay-at-home mother, football was a shared love for the Jahanbakhsh family. "I come from a really big football family; my uncles, my cousins, they really love football," the 24-year-old revealed.

"One of the most amazing moments that I still remember is the qualification for 1998, I was five or six years old and the dramatic qualifying of Iran to the World Cup against Australia.

"The country was crazy; everyone was out [in the streets]. It was crazy and people were so happy. My parents, my father, who is crazy about football, and I still remember the people were cheering and dancing in the streets."

It was that moment that inspired Jahanbakhsh, the second of three children – he has an older sister and younger brother – to take up the sport. But had a school teacher not intervened, Jahanbakhsh may have been lost to football at an early age.

A prodigious talent in multiple sports, Jahanbakhsh was selected for the junior national teams in both handball and futsal.

"I tried different sports," he explained. "Kung fu and athletics; I played handball for

the national team, and I was also selected for the country's youth futsal team.

"I think when I was 12 we had a sport teacher in the school, he told me I had to find my way, I had to choose between football and futsal. And at that time I would rather play football."

Like so many of Iran's footballers,

"I KNEW IF I WANTED TO BE A BETTER PLAYER, TO BECOME BETTER AND BETTER EVERY SINGLE DAY, THERE WOULD BE A LIMIT IN IRAN. SO IF YOU WANT TO MAKE IT FURTHER YOU HAVE TO GO TO EUROPE."

Jahanbakhsh learned his craft playing in the streets with his friends from his local neighbourhood in Qazvin.

"What I really remember about that time was I was in a hurry to finish school and to go and play in the streets with the guys from the neighbourhood," he recalled.

"All that mattered for me was that small ball and playing with the ball. It didn't matter if that was in the afternoon in 32 or 35 degrees or even in the winter in the cold weather. I had a lot of fun.

"The nicest thing I remember was always

playing with the older people because they were always saying 'he has really nice skills' and they wanted me on their team. It was such a great time."

With his talent obvious for all to see, his parents were only too happy to nurture their son's ambitions.

"We weren't from a rich family, but [my father] was always supporting me because he knew that I was just following my ambitions, following my dreams," he said.

But his father also wanted his eldest son to learn the value of hard work. Over the summer break, when Jahanbakhsh was a young teenager, his father made him work in the bicycle factory alongside him to engender a sense of independence in his son – but there was a downside.

"I was working just fixing the wheels of the bicycles. My father told me if you want to get some money you have to come there and work and be independent and earn your own money. And I was working there fixing the wheels in the factory; it was also a lot of fun.

"But what made me a little bit annoyed was I had less time to play football as I had to work from six o'clock in the morning to five or six o'clock in the evening, and then afterwards I had only three hours to play football. I was so tired but still I went to the street to play."

Before too long Jahanbakhsh had outgrown his hometown and at the age of just 15 moved to Tehran to further his burgeoning football career. He made his professional debut at age 17 for Damash Gilan, a club that represents the province of Gilan in northern Iran, where his parents were born and raised.

Looking for any opportunity to play, Jahanbakhsh began his career as a full-back, because the right wing position was already occupied by Iranian legend Mehdi Mahdavi.

"The first game that I played in the first division in Iran I played as a right-back," he said with a chuckle.

"At that time the club spent a lot of money, they invested in a lot of big players, so they took Mehdi to the club, but he wanted to play as a right winger.

"So they were searching for someone and the coach said, 'ah this little kid, he has potential to play right-back'. I was 17 and he asked me can you do that and I said 'why not? [I'll play] wherever'.

"I played right-back the first game, and also the second game, but afterwards I told them I would like to play closer to goal, so I went to the right wing."

And he hasn't looked back since. Given his prodigious ability it wasn't long before scouts in Europe were aware of his talents – skills that were on full display at the

Far Left
With Dutch side AZ Alkmaar

Left
FIFA World Cup Russia 2018

Above
FIFA World Cup Russia 2018 qualifying

"IT'S A DIFFERENT CULTURE, DIFFERENT LANGUAGE, DIFFERENT MINDSET. THEY'RE ONE OF THE FREEST COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD. I AM GOING FROM AN ISLAMIC COUNTRY TO THE FREEST COUNTRY IN THE WORLD."

2012 AFC U-19 Championships, where he scored two goals as he helped Iran reach the quarter-finals.

"After the tournament I heard that I had an offer from NEC Nijmegen," he said. "They gave me an offer, and at that time I had offers from France and Turkey.

"But I knew because of their academies and the way they work with the youth and everything, that in Holland they could help me more," explained Jahanbakhsh.

"In Iran we have a lot of good players, [but] mostly we are individual players with good skills. But I knew if I wanted to be a better player, to become better and better every single day, there would be a limit in Iran. So if you want to make it further you have to go

to Europe." And the learning didn't just come on the pitch, the adjustment to life in a foreign country at just 19 years of age was not easy.

"The first couple of weeks were really tough because Holland is really different from Iran," said the forward, who spoke only a little English when he arrived.

"It's a different culture, different language, different mindset. They're one of the freest countries in the world. I am going from an Islamic country to the freest country in the world, so it was difficult and I had to adapt myself to different situations, like how to communicate with the people.

"Communication with my teammates was really difficult because I couldn't understand them. When I got the offer from NEC I had almost two months to decide if I wanted to go or not. In that time I had a personal [English] teacher.

"But that wasn't enough. When I went there I understood my teammates, but just to answer, just to say what I wanted was really difficult. But the club asked the local teacher to teach me how to speak. At the same time I was learning English and also a little bit of Dutch. It was great and after a couple of months I could speak with my teammates."

After two seasons with NEC Nijmegen,



Above & Left FIFA World Cup Russia 2018

"ONE OF THE MOST AMAZING MOMENTS THAT I STILL REMEMBER IS THE QUALIFICATION FOR 1998, I WAS FIVE OR SIX YEARS OLD AND THE DRAMATIC QUALIFYING OF IRAN TO THE WORLD CUP AGAINST AUSTRALIA."

during which he won the Eerste Divisie (second division) Player of the Year award in his second year at the club, the opportunity presented itself to take the next step in his career.

"It was a big decision because I knew at the age of 21-22 you have to make a really good step," he explained.

"Because I became the Player of the Year, everyone expected me to make a good step. I had different offers but I wanted to stay in Holland because I wanted to learn more, to stay in the competition, because after two years I knew more about the culture, about the language, the people, the style of football – everything.

"I had three offers and AZ Alkmaar was the best I had at that time, and I am very happy I made that step."

A knee injury in his first season meant he couldn't have the impact he would have liked, with just three goals in 23 matches. In his second season he improved his output and hit double figures, with 10 goals.

But his third season, the 2017/18 campaign, saw him take his game to a whole new level. His 21 goals were enough for him to win the Golden Boot award, while he also finished in the top three in the league for assists with 12, which he says gives him more satisfaction than scoring goals.

"For me personally giving assists is a better feeling than scoring goals," he revealed.

That doesn't mean he doesn't value the Golden Boot award, however, admitting it is his greatest achievement in his career so far – but he wants more.

"To be honest until now it's the top moment in my career," he said.

"That means a lot to me. That says that hard work pays off. I dedicated this to my family, my agent, my friends, all my

teammates; all the people who helped me.

"It's been an amazing feeling, but on the other side I am also going to forget it because I have a long way to go and I want to achieve more things as an individual and as a team."

At the same time he was flourishing in Europe, so too was his career with the Iran national team. He was just 19 when he was named in the 23-man squad for the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil and, while he only managed 49 minutes off the bench across the three group stage matches, just having that experience on the global stage was a dream come true.

"The first World Cup was unbelievable," he admitted.

"It was a great experience for me at the age of 19 after six months playing in Europe. Inside of football and outside of football I learned a lot, and at the age of 19 when you go to such a tournament it's just about having the experience, learning a lot and watching a lot, and seeing the best players in the world."

Jahanbakhsh recently played a major role in his country's memorable FIFA World Cup performance in Russia as Team Melli came within a goal of qualifying for the Round of 16

for the first time.

After defeating Morocco in their opening game, Iran lost 1-0 to 2010 FIFA World Cup winners Spain in a hard-fought contest, before drawing 1-1 with Portugal to miss out on the knockout rounds by the narrowest of margins after Mehdi Taremi skewed a golden chance to win it wide at the death.

The tournament may have ended in heartbreak for the forward and his teammates, but Iran won many new fans by giving two of the global giants an almighty scare as they proved themselves a match for anyone.

Jahanbakhsh is still only 24, but he has well and truly established himself as one of the stars of the national team, and for him there is no better feeling than wearing the jersey of his beloved Iran.

But with his rising stature comes increased pressure, and he knows he must now deliver the same form he has produced at club level if he is to realise the one goal he is desperate to achieve – win the AFC Asian Cup, something Iran have not done since 1976.

"I know that after such a season the expectation is higher for me," he admitted. "But on the other side, I just try to do my best whenever I am wearing the jersey of the national team, whether it's a World Cup or Asian Cup or even just a normal friendly.

"But of course some competitions are more important. So that's why I know the value of these two competitions, the World Cup and then the Asian Cup, they mean a lot for our people.

"One of the things I always dream of is winning the Asian Cup with Iran. That's one thing that hasn't happened for a long time now."



THE RACE IS ON

THE LIST OF CONTENDERS TO BE CROWNED 2018 AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE WINNERS IS DOWN TO JUST EIGHT AHEAD OF THE QUARTER-FINALS, BUT WHO WILL COME OUT ON TOP?

With four former continental champions, a team with a perfect record, a 2017 semi-finalist, a Japanese giant and a tournament debutant all in the hunt for the 2018 AFC Champions League title, a thrilling set of last eight match-ups await.

Two-time AFC Champions League winners Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors are aiming to be the first side to win a hat-trick of titles and the 2016 winners stormed into the last eight as the tournament's top scorers.

Al Sadd remain the last side from West Asia to lift the title after defeating Jeonbuk

in the 2011 final and return to the quarter-finals for the first time since 2014, while fellow Qatari side Al Duhail have won all eight of their matches to date.

Korea Republic's Suwon Samsung Bluewings have tasted continental glory in the past, winning the Asian Club Championship in 2001 and 2002 before the inception of the AFC Champions League.

The Islamic Republic of Iran's Esteghlal managed the same feat, in 1970 and 1991, while another Tehran club, Persepolis, are in the last eight for the second successive year.

Japan's Kashima Antlers return to the quarter-finals a decade after their first appearance and newcomers Tianjin Quanjian of China complete an exciting line-up.





Esteghlal

VS

First Leg - 27/08/18 • 20:30



Esteghlal were drawn in Group D alongside inaugural champions Al Ain, 2017 runners-up Al Hilal and Al Rayyan and remained unbeaten to top the standings.

Ali Ghorbani scored late to secure a 2-2 draw with Al Rayyan on Matchday One, before Senegalese striker Mame Thiam registered the only goal of the game in a 1-0 victory over Al Hilal.

Back-to-back draws with Al Ain followed before a 2-0 win over Al Rayyan secured qualification. A 1-0 victory over Al Hilal then wrapped up top spot to set up a date with domestic rivals Zobahan in the Round of 16.

After losing the first leg 1-0 in Isfahan, Thiam scored a hat-trick at Azadi Stadium as a 3-1 win ensured Esteghlal progressed to a first quarter-final since 2013.

Winfried Schäfer's side have lost just once in eight matches ahead of the quarter-finals, and that to a late goal in their narrow defeat to Zobahan. If seven-goal Thiam maintains his scoring form then Esteghlal will be confident they have what it takes to continue their run on the continent.



Top
Mame Thiam

Above
Omid Ebrahimi



COACH Winfried Schäfer

German coach Winfried Schäfer has coached clubs all over the world, but his stint with Esteghlal is his first foray into the Iranian Pro League. He guided the Tehran side to the Hazfi Cup title earlier this year to secure an automatic place in next year's AFC Champions League, while African Cup of Nations and UAE Pro League titles also feature on his impressive resume.



Al Sadd

Second Leg - 17/09/18 • 19:00



Al Sadd's return to continental action for the first time since 2015 also marked a tournament debut for FIFA World Cup winner Xavi, who made his maiden appearance in the 2-1 opening-day win against Al Wasl.

Baghdad Bounedjah then scored twice as they beat Persepolis 3-1 and, after defeat in Uzbekistan to Nasaf, Spaniard Xavi opened his account in a 4-0 victory over the same opponents.

Bounedjah added another brace as qualification was secured with a 2-1 victory over Al Wasl, before they finished second in Group C following a 1-0 defeat to Persepolis.

Saudi Arabia's Al Ahli were next, and a fourth successive home win was secured after a brace from Boualem Khoukhi, in a 2-1 victory, before top scorer Bounedjah took his tally to nine after a double in a 2-2 draw as Al Sadd advanced 4-3 on aggregate.

A quarter-final first leg at Tehran's Azadi Stadium may be a daunting task, but in the competition's joint top scorer Bounedjah and Xavi, Al Sadd will feel they have the tools to advance to the last four.



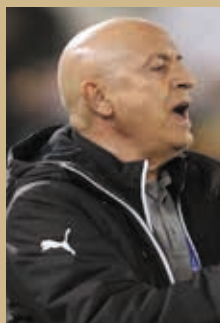
Top
Xavi

Above
Baghdad Bounedjah



COACH Jesualdo Ferreira

Jesualdo Ferreira took over the Al Sadd reins at the end of 2015 and led the Doha side to a record 16th Emir Cup in 2017. Having coached in his native Portugal, most notably with Porto, as well as in Spain, Greece, Morocco and Egypt, the 71-year-old boasts a wealth of experience, and will aim to steer Al Sadd to a first semi-final since 2011.



Al Duhail

First Leg - 28/08/18 • 18:30



Al Duhail's emergence as a force to be reckoned with has been one of the stories of the season.

Djamel Belmadi's side have swept everyone aside by winning all eight of their games.

It began with a 3-1 Group B victory over Zobahan as Al Duhail came from one down following late goals from Karim Boudiaf and Youssef Msakni.

Youssef El Arabi then scored three successive braces as Al Wahda and Lokomotiv (twice) were seen off and qualification was secured, before back-to-back 1-0 victories over Zobahan and Al Wahda.

Al Ain offered little resistance in the first knockout round as El Arabi was again among the scorers in a 4-2 away win in the first leg.

Two more for El Arabi took his tally to nine as an eighth successive win was secured in a 4-1 second-leg victory that saw Al Duhail advance 8-3 on aggregate.

Al Duhail are closing in on Ulsan Hyundai's record of nine straight wins and are now being talked about as genuine contenders for the title.



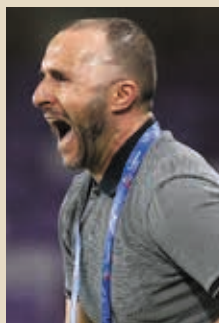
Top
Youssef El Arabi

Above
Nam Tae-hee



COACH Djamel Belmadi

Former Algeria international Djamel Belmadi has coached in Qatar since 2010, with spells at Lekhwiya either side of a stint with the national team, who he led to Gulf Cup glory in 2014. The 42-year-old boasts four Qatar Stars League titles and guided Al Duhail to a domestic treble in the 2017-18 campaign, while the club is also on a 21-game winning run.



VS

Persepolis

Second Leg - 18/09/18 • 19:45



Tehran side Persepolis are appearing in their second successive AFC Champions League quarter-final after making their maiden last-eight appearance in 2017.

Ali Alipour scored twice as the Iranian Pro League champions began the current campaign with a 3-0 victory over Uzbekistan's Nasaf, before going down 3-1 to Al Sadd in Qatar.

Back-to-back wins over Al Wasl were then followed with a scoreless draw away at Nasaf which confirmed a place in the Round of 16.

With top spot still to play for, Persepolis beat Al Sadd 1-0 to set up a clash with Al Jazira.

Persepolis lost the first leg 3-2 in Abu Dhabi but, back at Azadi Stadium with the scores tied at 1-1, captain Jalal Hosseini fired home with a minute to play to secure a 2-1 victory as the hosts advanced on away goals.

Without the goalscoring threat of the departed Mehdi Taremi, Persepolis have had to share the goals around more than in 2017, but Alipour has four to his name and the backline remains stubborn.



Top
Ali Alipour

Above
Ahmad Nourollahi



COACH Branko Ivankovic

Croatian Branko Ivankovic has been at Persepolis since 2015, having previously coached in Europe and Asia. The 64-year-old guided Islamic Republic of Iran to third place at the 2004 AFC Asian Cup and led them to the 2006 FIFA World Cup. Back-to-back league titles at Persepolis and impressive runs of the continent are proof of a job well done in Tehran.





Kashima Antlers

First Leg - 28/08/18 • 19:00



Kashima Antlers have only once reached the quarter-finals of the AFC Champions League, back in 2008.

After a 1-1 opening-day draw with Shanghai Shenhua in Group H, Kashima won away at Suwon Samsung Bluewings and Sydney FC. The East Asian side picked up just two more points in their final three games but did enough to advance to the next phase after finishing second.

Kashima were faced with Chinese opposition in the last 16 in the form of 2017 semi-finalists Shanghai SIPG, and Yuma Suzuki and Daigo Nishi were on the scoresheet in a 3-1 first-leg victory on home soil.

Shoma Doi's away goal shortly before half-time then made it 1-1 in Shanghai and, although the hosts ran out 2-1 winners, the Japanese side advanced 4-3 on aggregate.

A first semi-final appearance awaits if Kashima can overcome another Chinese team, Tianjin Quanjian, in the last eight as they aim to follow in the footsteps of 2017 champions Urawa Red Diamonds.



Top
Yasushi Endo

Above
Yuma Suzuki



COACH Go Oiwa

Former Kashima defender Go Oiwa spent eight seasons at the club during his playing career and claimed three successive J.League titles between 2007 and 2009. Oiwa took over the Kashima reins in May last year and guided the side to second place in the J.League, narrowly losing out to Kawasaki Frontale, before steering his charges to the last eight on the continent.

VS

Tianjin Quanjian

Second Leg - 18/09/18 • 19:30



Having only gained promotion to China's top flight at the end of 2016, Tianjin Quanjian secured a place in Asia's biggest club competition at the first time of asking a year later.

Anthony Modeste and Sun Ke netted in a 3-0 win over Hong Kong's Kitchee SC in their continental debut, before Alexandre Pato scored late on in a 1-1 draw against Kashiwa Reysol.

A 6-3 defeat at Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors followed, but late goals from Modeste and Pato next secured a 4-2 win over the same opponents.

A 1-0 victory over Kitchee guaranteed qualification before Zhao Xuri bagged a brace in a 3-2 win over Kashiwa as Tianjin finished second in Group E.

Two-time continental champions and domestic rivals Guangzhou Evergrande offered the sternest of tests in the last 16 and a scoreless home draw in the first leg left the tie firmly in the balance.

Guangzhou twice took the lead in the return meeting but Pato and Wang Jie pegged them back each time as a 2-2 draw saw Tianjin advance on away goals as the debutants marched on to the last eight.



Top
Alexandre Pato

Above
Axel Witsel



COACH Paulo Sousa

Former Portugal international Paulo Sousa won back-to-back UEFA Champions League titles with Juventus and Borussia Dortmund in the 1990s among a host of other honours as a player. The 47-year-old has won league titles in Israel and Switzerland in his coaching career, while he has also coached clubs in England and Italy. The Portuguese took over at Tianjin at the end of 2017.



Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors

First Leg - 29/08/18 • 19:00



Korea Republic's Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors have twice won the AFC Champions League, while also finishing as runners-up in 2011.

Choi Kang-hee's side have been in fine form and enter the last eight as the tournament's top scorers.

It began with a 3-2 win over Kashiwa Reysol in Group E, with the competition's all-time leading scorer Lee Dong-gook netting a brace. Adriano and Kim Shin-wook then scored trebles in 6-0 and 6-3 wins against Kitchee SC and Tianjin Quanjian.

Defeat in Tianjin was followed by wins over Kashiwa and Kitchee as Jeonbuk returned to the knockout rounds in style.

Son Jun-ho grabbed a late away goal in a 3-2 defeat at Buriram United in the first leg of the last 16, before goals from Ricardo Lopes and Lee Jae-sung finished the job in a 2-0 home win.

Jeonbuk's strength is underlined by the fact that four of their players were named in Korea's Republic's 2018 FIFA World Cup squad and they head into the quarter-finals as one of the tournament favourites.



Top
Lee Jae-sung

Above
Ricardo Lopes



COACH Choi Kang-hee

Choi Kang-hee is aiming for an unprecedented third AFC Champions League title with Jeonbuk, while the 2016 AFC Coach of the Year also boasts five K League championships with the side. In between his two hugely successful spells at Jeonbuk, the 59-year-old guided Korea Republic to the 2014 FIFA World Cup but returned to the club before the tournament in Brazil.



VS

Suwon Samsung Bluewings

Second Leg - 19/09/18 • 19:00



Suwon Samsung Bluewings returned to the knockout rounds for the first time since 2015 after topping Group H.

The two-time Asian champions' best performance in the AFC Champions League came in reaching the 2011 semi-finals.

New signing Dejan Damjanovic got off to the perfect start in netting both goals in a 2-0 win at Sydney FC.

One point from their next two Group H games left the K League side with work to do, but Montenegrin Damjanovic added another in a 2-0 victory at Shanghai Shenhua.

Suwon then lost to Sydney but defeated Kashima 1-0 to claim top spot.

Domestic rivals Ulsan Hyundai were next up in the Round of 16 and the 2012 champions claimed a 1-0 win in the first leg, but Suwon came back strongly in the reverse meeting.

Youngster Kim Gun-hee stole the headlines this time as the forward's two first-half goals put Suwon in the driving seat, before Brazilian Waguinho rounded off a 3-0 win as Suwon returned to the last eight.



Top
Dejan Damjanovic

Above
Kim Eun-sun



COACH Seo Jung-won

Seo Jung-won lifted back-to-back Asian Club Championships as a player with Suwon and appeared at two FIFA World Cups for Korea Republic in a playing career that also included spells in France and Austria. Seo has been in charge at Suwon since 2013, winning the Korean FA Cup in 2016 and twice finishing as runners-up in the league.





AFC
CUP

AFC CUP HUNT HEATS UP

DEFENDING AFC CUP CHAMPIONS AIR FORCE CLUB ARE LOOKING FOR AN UNPRECEDENTED THIRD TITLE IN A ROW AS THE IRAQI SIDE AIM TO EXTEND WEST ASIAN DOMINANCE IN THE COMPETITION. BUT SIX OTHER TEAMS REMAIN IN CONTENTION AS THE TOURNAMENT ENTERS ITS LATTER STAGES.

When Emad Mohsin struck midway through the second half of the 2017 AFC Cup final, he secured Air Force Club a 1-0 victory over Tajikistan's FC Istiklol and a second successive continental crown.

The victory also meant that 12 of the competition's 14 winners have come from West Asia, with only Uzbekistan's Nasaf and Malaysia's Johor Darul Ta'zim having taken the title outside of the region.

The holders have looked strong once more, reaching the West Asia Zonal final without tasting defeat, but will next face a stern test from another unbeaten side in

Jordan's Al Jazeera, who twice drew with the Baghdad team in the group stage.

Elsewhere, Ceres Negros of the Philippines and Singapore's Home United have again proven the strongest in their region as the pair progressed to the ASEAN Zonal final for the second year in a row.

The 2016 runners-up JSW Bengaluru came top in the South Asia Zone to return to the Inter-Zone semi-finals, where they will meet Turkmenistan's Altyn Asyr, who finished above two-time runners-up Istiklol in the Central Asia Zone to advance to the knockout rounds for the first time.

Completing the line-up of the seven remaining sides in the competition are DPR Korea's 4.25 SC, who won all six of their games in the East Asia Zone to book a date with the winner of Ceres and Home United.





Al Jazeera

VS

Air Force Club



First Leg - 18/09/18 • 19:00

Making only their second appearance in the AFC Cup, Al Jazeera produced some superb displays in Group A to finish above their next opponents, defending champions Air Force Club.

A 2-2 opening-day draw with the holders was a sign of things to come as the now departed Musa Al Taamari opened his account, before he netted in successive wins over Bahrain's Malkiya Club and Oman's Al Suwaiq.

The Amman club completed the double over the pair either side of another draw with Air Force Club when only a stoppage-time equaliser denied them three points.

Four wins and two draws, though, were enough to secure top spot and book a date with domestic rivals and two-time champions Al Faisaly in the West Asia Zonal semi-finals.

Al Taamari shone brightly, scoring a fabulous individual goal in a

1-1 draw in the first leg, before the 21-year-old netted another excellently taken goal to seal a 1-0 win in the return meeting.

Next up is another clash with Air Force Club and, having already come close to beating the holders, Al Jazeera will be confident it could be third time lucky.



Second Leg - 02/10/18 • 19:00

Prior to the current edition of the AFC Cup, Air Force Club had played 23 games and been beaten just twice en route to winning the title on each occasion.

The Iraqi side's run has now extended to 31 games and just two defeats as the two-time winners remain on course to lift the trophy for a third year in a row.

The defending champions haven't always looked at their best but have forged a winning mentality that makes them so hard to beat, while late goals have become commonplace.

Three down after 14 minutes to Bahrain's Malkiya Club in Group A on Matchday Three, they won 4-3 after a stoppage-time goal by Amjad Radhi, who rescued a point against Al Jazeera in the 93rd minute of their next game.

Air Force Club eventually qualified for the West Asia Zonal semi-



finals as the best-placed runner-up, before a 5-3 aggregate win over Lebanon's Al Ahed set up another date with Al Jazeera.

Now playing their home games back in Iraq, the holders will likely prove even tougher to knock off their perch as they aim for more glory.



JSW Bengaluru

VS

Altyn Asyr



First Leg - 22/08/18 • 20:00

The 2016 runners-up JSW Bengaluru are now mainstays in the AFC Cup and are competing in the knockout rounds for the fourth successive season after debuting in 2015.

A year later the Indian side defeated holders Johor Darul Ta'zim to advance to the final, but narrowly missed out following a 1-0 loss to Air Force Club. They returned last year and reached the Inter-Zone final, where they fell just short against eventual runners-up FC Istiklol.

Bengaluru are enjoying another fine year and won five of their six games in Group E, although it was only after a nervy Matchday Six that qualification was confirmed, as their 4-0 win over Bangladesh's Abahani Limited Dhaka coupled with New Radiant SC's defeat against Aizawl secured top spot.

Spaniard Albert Roca guided Bengaluru to the 2016 final and led

them to a second-place finish in their first Indian Super League season but stepped down after the group stage.

But a squad that includes India talisman Sunil Chhetri, goalkeeper Gurpreet Singh and youngster Udanta Singh will be desperate to make up for near misses.



Second Leg - 29/08/18 • 17:30

Having missed out on the knockout rounds on the final day of the 2017 campaign following a late defeat to FC Istiklol, Altyn Asyr enjoyed sweet revenge this time round.

The Turkmen side won one and drew two of their first three Group D games, which included crucial goals at the death from Myrat Yagsyev and Altymyrat Annadurdyev to come from two down to end 2-2 with Istiklol.

Home wins over domestic rivals FC Ahal and Kyrgyz Republic's FC Alay then meant Altyn Asyr went into their final group game in Tajikistan two points adrift of Istiklol in what proved to be one of the most dramatic matches of the tournament.

Needing a win to advance, the Turkmen side found themselves two goals up at the interval, but conceded in the 83rd and 91st

minutes and were seemingly heading for the exit door.

But the game was not up for Altyn Asyr as Mihail Titov netted seven minutes into added time to spark jubilant celebrations among the visitors as they leapfrogged their opponents into first place.



Ceres Negros

VS

Home United



First Leg - 01/08/18 • 19:30

Ceres Negros are fast developing into a regional powerhouse after the side from the Philippines progressed to the AZEAN Zonal final for the second successive year.

It all began with a record-equaling 9-0 victory over Cambodia's Boeung Ket FC in Group F, before three wins and a draw from their next four games all but secured a place in the knockout rounds.

A 2-0 defeat to Home United meant Ceres had to settle for the best-placed runner-up spot as a date with Myanmar's Yangon United awaited in the Inter-Zone semi-finals.

Bienvenido Maranon bagged a brace as Ceres raced into a 3-0 half-time lead in the first leg, but the game ended 4-2 to leave the Filipino side with plenty to do.

After falling behind early in the return meeting in Myanmar, Manny Ott leveled before Maranon made it 2-1 with 12 minutes to play.

Yangon eventually won 3-2 but Ceres ran out 6-5 aggregate winners.

Familiar foes Home United now stand between Ceres and a place in the Inter-Zone semi-finals, just like they did last year when the side from Bacolod City advanced even deeper into the competition.



Second Leg - 08/08/18 • 19:30

Appearing in their second successive ASEAN Zonal final, Home United have momentum on their side after five wins in a row.

Defeat to Cambodia's Boeung Ket FC on Matchday Three left the Singaporean side with a tough task to qualify from Group F, but it was one they answered in style.

Boeung Ket and Shan United were seen off in their next two games but an away win at Ceres Negros was still needed to secure qualification. Izzdin Shafiq and Song Ui-young scored late in the game as a 2-0 win helped Home United leapfrog the Filipino side into first place.

Indonesia's Persija Jakarta were next up and Song was again on the scoresheet in a 3-2 victory in the first leg in Singapore. Then, in front of a record AFC Cup attendance in Jakarta, a brace from Shahril Ishak and another from Song secured a 3-1 win as Home United progressed 6-3

on aggregate. Song has now scored in each of his last six games as Home United get stronger the further into the competition they go. A semi-final appearance in 2004 remains their best performance, but that could well change in 2018 should they maintain their form.



4.25 SC

First Leg - 21/08/18 • 17:00 Second Leg - 28/08/18 • 17:00

Back in the Inter-Zone semi-finals for the second year in succession, DPR Korea's 4.25 SC stormed into the knockout rounds after sweeping everyone aside in Group I.

Captain An Il Bom struck late on in a hard-fought 1-0 victory over domestic rivals Hwaepul SC as 4.25 got off to a winning start, before big wins over Chinese Taipei's Hang Yuen FC and Benfica Macau left 4.25 in a strong position at the midway stage.

An's brace in a 2-0 win in Macau meant the Pyongyang side were on the verge of qualification ahead of the return meeting with Hwaepul.

The skipper then netted for the fifth successive game and Kim Yu Song added another as a 2-0 win secured qualification, before 4.25 made it a perfect six victories from six by seeing off Hang Yuen 5-1.



On their debut last year 4.25 also reached the Inter-Zone semi-finals but were ousted by India's JSW Bengaluru. They return looking even stronger and in their captain An have a player with real quality who is capable of steering them even further into the tournament.



AFC CUP 2018

ASEAN Zonal Final

Home United

VS

Ceres Negros

Inter-Zone Semi-Final

4.25 SC

VS

JSW Bengaluru

VS

Altyn Asyr

West Asia Zonal Final

Al Jazeera

VS

Air Force Club

FROM ZERO TO HERO

AFTER LEAVING GERMANY FOR THE PHILIPPINES AT THE END OF 2015, KEVIN INGRESO’S CAREER HAS GONE FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH, WITH THE MIDFIELDER AIMING FOR MORE AFC CUP SUCCESS WITH CERES NEGROS AND SET TO MAKE HIS AFC ASIAN CUP BOW WITH THE PHILIPPINES.

Interview by: Daniel Pordes Written by: Peter Alsop
Photos: Lagardère Sports, Philippines Football Federation, Stephen Tan

A nation was expecting ahead of the visit of Tajikistan in March. Having won two and drawn three of their five games in the third round of AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 qualifiers, the Philippines stood on the verge of creating history ahead of their final Group F game against the Central Asians at Manila’s Rizal Memorial Stadium.

Unbeaten and two points clear of their opponents, and Yemen, at the top of the standings, their task was simple: avoid defeat and qualify for the competition for

the first time. The achievement would cap a remarkable rise from ASEAN minnows to joining Asia’s elite at the continental competition.

The hosts had enjoyed the better of the first half but failed to make their advantage count; however, the game was turned on its head just after the hour.

After the Philippines had failed to clear a Tajikistan attack, Nuriddin Davronov burst into the box and was impeded by the tracking back Kevin Ingreso. The referee pointed to the spot and the crowd was stunned into silence. Akhtam Nazarov converted and the Southeast Asians’ hopes of qualifying were up





in the air.

“After I made that foul I was almost crying,” admits 25-year-old Ingreso. “I didn’t even complain to the referee, I messed up big time. Emotionally and mentally it wasn’t easy. I was a mess.

“It was the worst moment I’ve ever had in my career. Carli di Murga and Simone Rota came up to me and said there was plenty of time, it could happen to anyone.”

Redemption, though, was not long in coming as 10 minutes later Ingreso found himself on the end of a looped Iain Ramsay cross from the left and headed home to spark joyous celebrations all around.

An injury-time Phil Younghusband penalty eventually capped a 2-1 win as the Philippines advanced to their maiden AFC Asian Cup and Ingreso’s rollercoaster of a night ended on the ultimate high.

“I was jogging forward and saw a lot of space and I knew Iain was going to cross,” recalls the midfielder.

“I don’t have the best heading skills but I saw the defender coming at me and thought if I controlled it I might lose it, so I headed it. I was lucky as I hit it perfectly, but I still can’t believe I made it.

“It’s like a movie, making a big mistake but then scoring the saving goal. I would have taken the boring 0-0 to go to the Asian Cup,

but the atmosphere was amazing and I will never forget the game.”

Born in Hamburg to a Filipino father and a German mother, Ingreso took up football at the age of six. At 13, he joined the St. Pauli youth team but was soon acquired by the club’s more illustrious neighbours: Hamburger SV. Here, Ingreso was part of a set-up that included arguably the greatest Asian player of the current generation: Son Heung-min.

But, after signing his first professional contract with the club and representing their second team between 2011 and 2013, the midfielder wanted more game time and dropped down to Germany’s lower tiers. In 2015, though, his life would take a dramatic twist.

“[Philippines coach] Thomas Dooley called me out of the blue to tell me he was in Germany,” reveals Ingreso.

“He’d heard a lot about me and said he wanted to see if I was an option for the national team. After watching me play he was waiting for me and told me he was going to invite me for the World Cup qualifiers in June 2015.”

Ingreso traveled east and watched from the sidelines as the Philippines defeated Bahrain in their first FIFA World Cup Russia 2018 qualifying game, before coming off the bench as a late substitute to earn his international debut in a 2-0 win over Yemen in Doha.

But the decision to represent the Southeast

Asian nation would also end up having a far greater effect on his life than just making the occasional long flight halfway round the world as Ingreso, after speaking with teammates including Patrick Reichelt and Manny Ott, was ultimately talked into playing his club football in the country with Ceres Negros.

At Ceres, Ingreso teamed up with a number of his international colleagues and what followed has been a rise to the summit of Philippines club football.

After finishing second in the league in his first season and making his AFC Cup debut in a campaign that was hindered by injury, 2017 would prove a huge success.

Ceres were crowned league champions and finished top of their group on the continent. They edged 2015 AFC Cup winners Johor Darul Ta’zim of Malaysia on away goals in the ASEAN Zonal semi-finals and then defeated Singapore’s Home United to be crowned ASEAN Zonal champions and advance to the Inter-Zone semi-finals.

A 4-0 defeat to Tajikistan’s FC Istiklol in Dushanbe ultimately gave Ceres too much to do as they exited 5-1 on aggregate but the Busmen had broken new ground for the Philippines, whose sides have only been competing in the AFC Cup since 2015.

“We are super proud of what we achieved together and, for me, it was the biggest

achievement so far in my life,” reflects Ingreso.

“People were saying we were just a small Filipino team who couldn’t do anything, so when we beat Home United 2-0, our players were crying.”

Winning the Philippines Football League meant Ceres were entered into the 2018 AFC Champions League Preliminary Round, where they defeated Myanmar’s Shan United on penalties, before pulling off a stunning upset by winning 3-2 away at Australia’s Brisbane Roar.

Now just 90 minutes away from the Philippines’ maiden appearance in the group stage of the competition, Ceres were faced with the daunting challenge of China’s Tianjin Quanjian, a side boasting global stars Alexandre Pato, Axel Witsel and Anthony Modeste.

A 2-0 loss in freezing conditions ensued but Ceres had again proven themselves a force to be reckoned with and returned to the AFC Cup group stage widely considered one of the strongest teams in the ASEAN region.

“You can learn from players such as Witsel, Modeste and Pato,” says Ingreso. “We had a really bad preparation as our visas were late and we arrived [in China] at 6am on the day of the game.

“It was the biggest game in our history. We had been training in 35 degrees the day before

Far Left & Above Left
2018 AFC Cup

Below Left & Above AFC
Asian Cup UAE 2019 qualifiers

in the Philippines and arrived at minus five degrees on game day.

“But it was a nice experience – even though we had no sleep or preparation – and you can’t take those memories away from us.”

Ceres kicked off their AFC Cup campaign with a record-equaling 9-0 victory over Cambodia’s Boeung Ket FC in their opening Group F game as they underlined their intentions from the off.

Three wins and a draw from the next four games followed before Home United won in Bacolod City to pip Ceres to top spot. Both teams qualified for the Zonal semi-finals and, after the Filipino side defeated Yangon United and the Singaporeans beat Persija Jakarta, they will meet once more in the Zonal final.

“We were confident but as the Zonal champions we knew everyone wanted to beat us,” admits Ingreso. “But the good thing is that most of us stayed together so it’s basically the same team with not many adjustments.

“We’re looking forward to the first game [against Home United] and it’s time to prove ourselves again. We have to bring our game on the pitch, then we believe we can win. You have to defend the title.”

The first half of 2018 could barely have gone

any better for Ingreso, but the months ahead provide the potential to exceed anything that has gone before in the midfielder’s career.

Ceres are just one of seven teams remaining in the AFC Cup, while the Philippines’ biggest moment in international football kicks off in early 2019 when the eyes of a nation will be on the Azkals in their maiden AFC Asian Cup campaign.

The tournament also offers Ingreso the chance of a meeting with his former teammate Son, after the Philippines were drawn in a strong Group C alongside Korea Republic, China and Kyrgyz Republic.

“All of the teams in our group are strong. I was happy that we got Korea because I played in the U-17 and U-19 youth teams with Son Heung-min, so I’m happy that we’ll see each other and play against each other.

“Last time I saw him was in the youth team and I’ve since seen him make a name for himself and become a superstar, but when we see each other we’ll talk.”

One of just three debutants, the Philippines will go into the AFC Asian Cup as underdogs.

But with the competition introducing the Round of 16 for the first time, there will be hope of springing a surprise.

“When it comes to playing for the Azkals, I get goosebumps. I want to play my heart out representing Filipinos all over the world.”

LATE ARRIVAL

HAVING WAITED UNTIL HE WAS 27 TO MAKE HIS AUSTRALIA DEBUT LAST YEAR, MATTHEW JURMAN IMPRESSED ENOUGH TO EARN A PLACE IN THE SOCCEROOS FIFA WORLD CUP SQUAD. WITH THE TOURNAMENT NOW OVER, THE DEFENDER'S NEXT TARGET IS THE AFC ASIAN CUP TITLE IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES IN 2019.

By: Paul Williams Photos: Getty Images/Lagardère Sports/Al Ittihad

Every cloud has a silver lining, and that is certainly the case for Australian defender Matthew Jurman. When the Socceroos failed to qualify directly for the 2018 FIFA World Cup, there was a palpable sense of disappointment right across the country and, although he was living in Korea Republic at the time, Jurman felt that as much as anyone. But from adversity comes opportunity.

Jurman, who had watched on from the sidelines as Australia battled their way through qualifying, was handed a first call-up by then coach Ange Postecoglou for the two play-off matches against Syria in October 2017. And it was an opportunity he grasped with both hands after being given a starting berth for both legs, not putting a foot wrong alongside Trent Sainsbury in defence. Possession, they say, is nine tenths of the law. After two composed performances, suddenly that left-sided central defender role





was his and his to lose.

Jurman followed that up with two further standout performances against Honduras in November, and in the blink of an eye he was now an entrenched member of the Socceroos squad.

“If you want to look at it from one perspective, if the team qualified automatically I don’t know if I would have been at the World Cup because I wouldn’t have had those four games last year,” he said on the eve of the FIFA World Cup in Russia.

“So everything happens for a reason, the team didn’t qualify directly and I got my chance that way when Ange called me up for the Syria and Honduras games. I guess in that way it worked out for me personally and as a team we went through a lot more. It made us a lot more battle hardened.”

Jurman, who had represented Australia at both U-20 and U-23 level, had to wait patiently for his senior national team debut, with his first match against Syria coming at the age of 27. But the wait just made the experience all the more memorable.

“I played for the 20s and 23s and obviously my goal after that was to try and get into the senior team, and it took me a bit of time to get there,” he explained.

“But when I was putting the jersey on and walking out it was a very proud moment,

something I’ve wanted to do my whole life, watching all these players that I’ve looked up to. It was just a really proud moment and something I’ll always cherish.”

It was the culmination of more than 20 years of hard work since he first started playing football in his home town of Wollongong, New South Wales.

“I started playing when I was four years old,” he recalled. “My dad played and he coached as well and he got me involved pretty early, and I was playing for Dapto in Wollongong.

“I fell in love with the game; I loved playing with the ball. I’ve still got them now, my first little boots and first little ball. Whenever there was a ball my brother and I were always kicking it around at home, on the street or going down to the park with my dad and having a kick around.

“As we got older we still went down to the park and did extra training together whenever we could. My dad being Croatian, he was always my hardest critic, watching my games and always picking out little things I could do better.

“And I always had the support from my mum, my dad and my brother and sister. They all helped me get here from a young age. My parents have done a lot for me. It wasn’t easy growing up, they both worked hard, the things they let me do to achieve my dreams won’t be

forgotten.”

One of those dreams was achieved when Bert van Marwijk, Australia’s temporary head coach until the end of the FIFA World Cup, selected Jurman in his 23-man squad for the global showpiece in Russia.

Unfortunately for the defender, he did not get on the pitch during the Socceroos’ three group stage matches as they were eliminated following defeats to France and Peru either side of a draw with Denmark.

But with the FIFA World Cup now done and dusted for another four years, Jurman and his Socceroos teammates have their eyes firmly on retaining the AFC Asian Cup title in the UAE in January under the guidance of new coach Graham Arnold, someone Jurman knows well from his time with Sydney FC.

“We’d love to defend the title,” Jurman said. “It was a massive thing for the country to win it last time and everyone is going to be coming after us this time. So we’re definitely going to be ready when that comes around.

“I think Arnie’s (Graham Arnold) going to be great. I think he’s done a great job the last three years with Sydney FC and I was lucky enough to work with him. He gave me a lot of confidence, and he gave the team a lot of confidence, as you can see by them

playing great football and getting great results.

“So I think he will be great for the Socceroos and I think going forward hopefully we can see the country winning a lot more games and winning some more trophies.”

Playing in Asia is something Jurman has become quite familiar with over the last 18 months after he switched the sky blue of Sydney FC for the royal blue of Suwon Samsung Bluewings, a decision he admits was hard to make at the time.

“I think for me, when I first went, the toughest thing was moving from Sydney and knowing that the team we had was going to win some things that year,” he admitted.

“That was a year I felt really comfortable, and was playing in the team. I had to move away from that knowing they were going to win things.”

But looking back he wouldn’t have it any other way. “Korea was good, I enjoyed my time there,” said Jurman, who recently departed Suwon to join Saudi Arabian giants Al Ittihad.

“[Moving overseas] is something I’ve wanted to do. I was ready to move to the next step in my career and Suwon came in to sign me. I thought it was a great opportunity for me to move into another league and try and prove myself in another country.

“Obviously not everything goes to plan.

Left FIFA World Cup Russia 2018 qualifiers

Above 2018 AFC Champions League

Below Signing for Al Ittihad



Coming back from my injury there were some tough times, but overall it’s been a great 18 months for me.”

The support of two other Australian players, Bruce Djite and Adrian Leijer, who were playing for second-tier Suwon FC when he arrived, helped ease the transition.

“They helped me when I first got there if I didn’t understand something, or if I needed help,” he said.

“I still had my translator at the club, but it

was good to have some Aussie boys there to help you and to catch up with them when you have some time off.”

Jurman will again have to start afresh following his decision to leave Suwon after the FIFA World Cup and join two-time AFC Champions League winners Al Ittihad.

With Suwon having reached the last eight of the AFC Champions League for the first time since 2011, the defender departs at a time when there is real hope of being crowned continental champions for a third time.

And while the 28-year-old is excited for the new challenge that life in the Saudi Pro League will bring, he also takes with him fond memories from his time in Korea Republic.

“From the day I became a Suwon Samsung Bluewings player, I loved every minute of it,” said Jurman.

“Being my first move overseas in my career it had its ups and downs, but I thoroughly enjoyed every moment and loved learning the Korean culture and way of living.

“I always gave my best when I played for Suwon and always tried to help the team win. I’ll miss the city, the fans, my teammates and all the coaching and office staff.

“Now, I’m looking forward to my next step in my career. I’m excited to have joined Al Ittihad and looking forward to my first game in yellow and black.”

NAM ON A MISSION

PART OF AL DUHAIL'S TREBLE-WINNING SIDE IN QATAR, NAM TAE-HEE HAS BEEN IN INSPIRED FORM BOTH DOMESTICALLY AND ON THE CONTINENT, WHERE THE KOREA REPUBLIC MIDFIELDER WILL BE CHASING AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE GLORY IN THE COMING MONTHS.

By: Ahmed Hashim Photos: Lagardère Sports/Getty Images

We're not done yet. That is a mantra that Nam Tae-hee likes to repeat in every interview since Al Duhail reached the quarter-finals of the AFC Champions League. Those words will undoubtedly worry quite a few of Asia's best teams.

The Korea Republic midfield wizard has been a vital cog in the Al Duhail juggernaut that has had a stunning run in the 2017-18 season. During the past year, the Doha side remained undefeated to win Qatar Stars League, completed a domestic treble and won all of their eight matches in the AFC

Champions League to breeze through to the quarter-finals.

The team's unprecedented success is even more captivating as they are technically a new club that has just turned a year old, having been formed in the summer of 2017 following the dissolution of El Jaish and its merger with Lekhwiya. Few could have predicted the way they have taken Asian football by storm this year.

For Nam, his side's scarcely believable season was the inevitable outcome of jigsaw pieces falling into place and the midfielder credits the success to Al Duhail's experienced core group of players, who have been supplemented by youngsters.

"Only two players have come in from El Jaish – Lucas Mendes and Murad Naji,"





says Nam.

“Otherwise, it’s more or less the same group. Previously, everybody was young, including myself. Now, we are all aged 26-27 and are in our best form. Over the years, we have gained experience in the AFC Champions League and all the other competitions.

“We now have a good bench as well with great young players. I feel this has strengthened the team; these players have helped the team a lot.”

Al Duhail are the youngest club in the AFC Champions League, while their predecessor Lekhwiya only came to existence in 2009. The side gained promotion to Qatar’s top division at the first attempt before winning the league title the very next year. When Nam joined Lekhwiya as a 20-year-old in January 2012, the team had already begun to make a name for itself.

Nam’s arrival in Qatar generated significant intrigue, especially as Lekhwiya would be his first club in Asia. The diminutive Korean has never played professionally in his homeland, having gained a footballing education at Reading’s academy in England before racking up three seasons’ worth of experience playing for Valenciennes in France.

While at Valenciennes, Nam became the

youngest Asian player to appear in a Ligue 1 game, aged just 18, and he arrived in Doha with a cosmopolitan upbringing, equipped with the kind of experience that a lot of his peers would not have.

For one thing, it helped him settle at Lekhwiya, where the language barrier was not too big of an issue.

“Here, a number of players (and members of the coaching staff) speak French, and I can communicate easily in French or English, as well,” Nam, who has now also picked up some Arabic, explains.

“I am lucky to play here. We have the best players in Qatar. It’s not just me who’s doing well. My teammates are among the best in the land. We help each other and that’s why everything works well.

“Every year, I have won something – the league or a cup. But this season has been the happiest for me. It’s been the best in the history of the club. We didn’t lose a game except the Super Cup at the beginning of the season. We drew just three times and won all the other games.”

The season has been characterised by Al Duhail’s enviable ability to overcome setbacks with a remarkable calmness. Their six wins out of six in the group stage of the AFC Champions League featured come-from-behind wins against Al Wahda of the United

Arab Emirates, Iranian side Zobahan and Uzbekistan’s Lokomotiv.

Faced with three-time finalists Al Ain in the last 16, Djamel Belmadi’s men flew into the UAE for the first leg without influential captain Youssef Msakni, who had been ruled out with a long-term knee injury. Right on cue, Nam stepped up to assume the mantle.

After Youssef El Arabi’s early goal put Al Duhail in front, Nam powered his side to go further ahead. First, he scored with a magnificent solo effort that started off in his own half, before coming up with two assists, stunning the home crowd into silence.

Al Ain eventually got back into the game with two late goals, setting the stage for a potentially nail-biting finish in the second leg in Doha. However, any hopes they might have had were dashed again a week later as Nam orchestrated a 4-1 win by setting up two goals.

“You don’t think about the final now. We have to focus on the quarter-final [against Iranian side Persepolis]. We know it’s a difficult task to overcome,” says Nam when asked about Al Duhail’s chances of winning the tournament.

“We have been here twice before (losing to China’s Guangzhou Evergrande and Saudi Arabia’s Al Hilal), but now, it’s different. We are in good form and we are ready to go far. Everybody knows it will be tough. We just

have to be prepared to win.”

The two games against Al Ain acted as a reminder as to how important Nam is to Belmadi’s side. He hadn’t scored or assisted a goal during the group stage, as Msakni and El Arabi grabbed the lion’s share of attention. In comparison, he scored four and assisted three during the 2017 group stage.

Yet, regardless of the statistics, Nam was always there, pulling the strings from midfield. And if anyone would ignore him, it would be at their own peril, as Al Ain learned in the Round of 16.

Despite earning the plaudits, Nam’s humility was on display as he showered praise on his captain and Player of the Season, Msakni. Both were named on the shortlist for Qatar’s best player award at the end of the season, alongside Al Sadd’s Xavi Hernandez.

“Msakni, without a doubt,” he said when quizzed on who he thought deserved the accolade. “He was the best player in our team and he deserved the award after this brilliant season. I was surprised to find my name on the list, although I was happy to be there.”

In Msakni’s absence, Nam has taken the team’s reins and led by example and he is now aiming for a first appearance in the AFC Champions League semi-finals. His

Above Far Left
2015 AFC Asian Cup

Left & Above 2018 AFC
Champions League

Below Far Left FIFA
World Cup Russia 2018 qualifiers

immediate future, meanwhile, remains with his long-term employers.

“At the moment, I’m very happy to play for Al Duhail,” he says. “I just want to focus on the team and the AFC Champions League. We have been trying to win it for a long time but we couldn’t. And now, I think we are ready to go all the way to the final. That’s what I’m focusing on.”

Yet, there is one club he would like to feature in at some point in the future.

“I’d like to play for Ulsan Hyundai. It’s the team I grew up in when I was young, and if I get a chance to go to Korea, I want to play there,” he admits.

Coincidentally, Al Duhail are currently chasing Ulsan’s record of nine consecutive wins in the AFC Champions League on their way to winning the 2012 title – a year after Al Sadd became the last side from West Asia to lift the continental title.

On the back of Al Duhail’s run of success so far, many will consider they have a strong chance of matching Ulsan and ending the West Asian drought.

“Of course, the media says we are the best

team. But I think we can do better and we want to improve. We want to keep moving forward,” reflects Nam.

In the midst of all the club success, the midfielder was devastated to miss out on a place in the Korea Republic squad for the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia.

“I’m very sad. I was in the 30-member provisional squad before the 2014 FIFA World Cup but I missed out in the end,” admits Nam. “I’m disappointed but this is the coach’s decision.

“This is football. This is life. It just means that another player is better than me and I have to work harder. I don’t know if I can return to the squad but I will never give up and will keep working hard and do my best. I have to push myself more to play at the next FIFA World Cup in Qatar.”

While he will be cheering on his Korea Republic teammates this summer in Russia, Nam will also be thinking about Al Duhail’s upcoming AFC Champions League quarter-final against Persepolis, which is set to be one of the most important games of his career.

If he continues to impress, he could very well be back in his nation’s plans for next year’s AFC Asian Cup in the United Arab Emirates, where the Taeguk Warriors will be targeting a first title since 1960.

GAME OF THEIR LIVES

ZUHAIR BAKHEET WAS PART OF A GOLDEN GENERATION OF UNITED ARAB EMIRATES PLAYERS THAT ADVANCED TO THE COUNTRY’S FIRST AND, TO DATE, ONLY FIFA WORLD CUP AND CAME WITHIN A PENALTY SHOOTOUT OF AFC ASIAN CUP GLORY ON HOME SOIL.

By: Wael Jabir Photo: Lagardère Sports

Abu Dhabi, December 21, 1996. Zuhair Bakheet watched from the dugout as his international teammates took to the pitch to face neighbouring Saudi Arabia at Zayed Sports City Stadium. For every single one of the 23 players dressed in white, whether on the field or on the bench, this was the game of their lives.

The United Arab Emirates’ thrilling 1996 AFC Asian Cup campaign was culminating there, against a side that had appeared in each of the three previous finals of the competition, lifting the trophy in 1984 and 1988 before losing to Japan in 1992.

The Emiratis, by way of contrast, had never reached a continental final, let alone win one. Four years earlier, they finished fourth in Japan, after losing to the same opponents, Saudi Arabia, in the semi-finals.

With the score locked at 0-0, UAE coach Tomislav Ivic summoned Bakheet from the bench at half-time. The pacey forward’s impact on proceedings was clear from the start; within two minutes, winger Hassan Saeed had stolen the ball from the Saudi defence and supplied a back-heeled pass for Bakheet, who surged into the box and shot from a narrow angle. His effort was blocked by goalkeeper Mohammed Al Deayea but fell into the path of Adnan Al Talyani.

This was arguably the finest player the nation has ever produced, six yards out, the ball dropping to him with the keeper nowhere to be seen. The 60,000 fans in the stands had started celebrating already when Al Talyani somehow managed to miscue his shot when it was much easier to score.

As the game wore on, Saudi Arabia had their left-back Hussein Abdulghani sent off for deliberately handling the ball. It was a big boost for the hosts, who took the game to their opponents in extra-time in pursuit of a winner.

“We didn’t want the match to go all the way to a penalty shootout; Saudi Arabia were a man down and we felt we had a chance,” remembers Bakheet.

“We were trained on penalties, but the Saudis had been to many finals, they had the experience. In 1988 they won the AFC Asian Cup on penalties too. So, psychologically they had an edge going into penalties.”

Although Bakheet was widely acknowledged as one of the best Emirati players of his generation, the then 29-year-old was not enjoying the best of campaigns on home soil. He had not scored a single goal and was eventually relegated to a substitute role come the



final. His introduction injected new energy into the Whites’ attack, but there would ultimately be no goals for the UAE, nor for their visitors, at the end of 120 minutes.

It all came down to five attempts from 12 yards out for each side. When the list of penalty takers was handed to the referee, Bakheet’s name was absent. “I was asked to take a penalty kick, but I refused,” he explains, “I had not been lucky in front of goal all tournament, so I was not feeling in a position to have a go.”

Both sides were successful with their first penalties, and the Saudis scored their second. Al Deayea then saved from Yousef Saleh, but parity was soon restored after Ibrahim Mater missed the target and

Khamees Saad converted for the Whites.

If Bakheet’s reason for not taking a penalty was his poor form in the tournament, his teammate Saeed was every bit in form, having netted three goals in the competition already. However, after Khalid Al Temawi had scored, the right winger’s attempt cannoned off the upright and went behind, meaning Khalid Al Muwallad’s composed finish was enough for Saudi Arabia to lift their third AFC Asian Cup title.

It was heartbreak for the Emiratis as the nation’s golden generation, which had delivered historic FIFA World Cup qualification six years earlier, failed to crown their careers with the coveted continental trophy. But Bakheet has no regrets.

“I played in three AFC Asian Cup editions, but 1996 remains my favourite; we played at home and enjoyed the backing of everyone, from the top level of government, to the UAE FA officials and all the fans. Every Emirati across the country was behind us.”

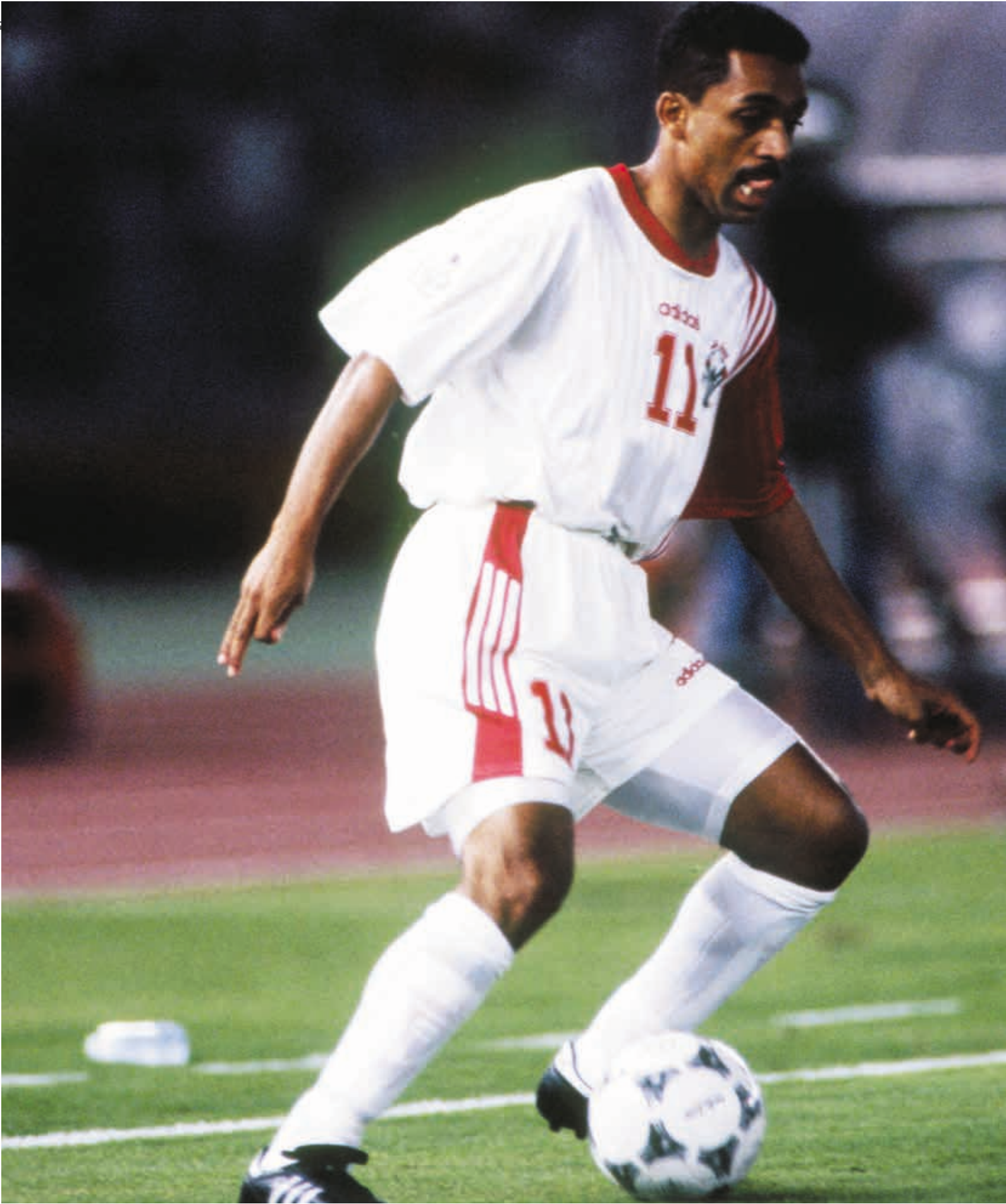
Twenty-two years and one month on from that painful defeat for the Emiratis, the AFC Asian Cup goes full circle as the Whites take on Bahrain in the opening match of the 2019 edition, on the very same ground that saw Bakheet’s generation settle for silver.

The UAE’s pursuit of a first continental title, under Italian coach Alberto Zaccheroni, will also see them face Thailand and India in Group A for a place in the knockout stages.

Bakheet has high expectations of Omar Abdulrahman, Ali Mabkhout and the rest on home soil. He believes the circumstances are different this time around under Zaccheroni, who won the 2011 AFC Asian Cup with Japan.

“Back then, we spent three or four months preparing for the tournament. The current generation does not have this luxury, but they are a very good crop of players – very talented.

“I hope they can get as good a preparation as possible, so they can at the very least match our achievement and reach the final.”





Former Winners Remain In Contention

Ah Ahli have advanced to the AFC Champions League quarter-finals after posting eight wins from eight, while former winners Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors and Al Sadd have also booked their places in the last eight.

The trio will be joined by a pair of former continental champions in Esteghlal and Suwon Samsung Bluwings, while Persepolis, Kashima Antlers and Tianjin Quanjian make up the remaining sides battling it out for continental glory.

Qatari side Al Duhail, enjoying a fine first season in the competition following the merger between Lekhwiya and El Jaish, won all six of their Group B games to set up a Round of 16 clash with inaugural AFC Champions League winners Al Ain.

The Emirati side had drawn their opening four matches but wins over Al Hilal and Al Rayyan saw them finish second in Group D and book a date with the continent's form side.

And it was Al Duhail who eased into the next round following a 4-2 win in Al Ain and a 4-1 victory in Doha as the competition's joint top scorer Youssef El Arabi netted three goals over the two games.

Al Duhail's domestic rivals Al Sadd, the last team from West Asia to lift the AFC Champions League, progressed to a first quarter-final since 2014 after edging past Saudi Arabia's Al Ahli.

The Doha side had earlier finished second in Group C and were handed the task of defeating an unbeaten Al Ahli side who reached the last eight a year earlier and had looked convincing in topping Group A

Boualem Khoukhi netted twice in a 2-1 first leg victory before Baghdad Bounedjah's brace helped claim a 2-2 draw in Jeddah as the former winners advanced 4-3 on aggregate and Bounedjah joined El Arabi on nine goals.

Winners in 2006 and 2016, Jeonbuk were absent last year but returned to top Group E after posting five wins from six and scoring a tournament high 22 goals.

The K League team were up against Buriram United in the last 16 after the Thai side finished second in Group G to secure a knockout round place for the first time since 2013.

Buriram's good form continued when they



ran out 2-1 winners in the first leg on home soil. But Jeonbuk had too much in the return meeting as Ricardo Lopes and Lee Jae-sung scored in a 2-0 victory that saw the Koreans progress 4-3 on aggregate.

Another two-time champion, Guangzhou Evergrande, were drawn against domestic rivals Tianjin Quanjian after the former had topped Group G and the latter finished second behind Jeonbuk in Group E.

The first leg in Tianjin ended scoreless but the reverse fixture at Tianhe Stadium produced plenty of drama as Alexandre Pato cancelled out Ricardo Goulart's opener and Wang Jie did likewise after Goulart had added a second as debutants Tianjin advanced on away goals.

Semi-finalists last year, Shanghai SIPG topped Group F but were not scoring with the regularity they had done a year earlier and they eventually came unstuck against Group H runners-up Kashima.

Yuma Suzuki and Daigo Nishi both scored in a 3-1 first leg win for the Japanese side, but Elkeson's late goal for Shanghai gave the Chinese side hope.

Hulk netted twice in the second leg in China

but Shoma Doi's away goal proved decisive as Kashima returned to the last eight for the first time in 10 years.

Suwon had beaten Kashima to top spot in Group H and were paired with Group F runners-up Ulsan Hyundai, who won the first leg 1-0 after a goal from Kim In-sung.

But a brace from the AFC Champions League's second highest scorer of all time Dejan Damjanovic helped Suwon to a 3-0 victory in the second leg to seal a quarter-final berth.

Back in West Asia, 2017 semi-finalists Persepolis had topped Group C to book a date with the UAE's Al Jazira, who had ended a 15-game winless run on the continent to finish second in Group A.

The Emirati side scored late to win the first leg 3-2, but 80,000 fans turned out at Azadi Stadium to witness Jalal Hosseini snatch an 89th-minute winner and a place in the last eight as their 2-1 victory saw Persepolis advance on away goals.

Finally, a second Iranian side will appear in the last eight as Group D winners Esteghlal overcame their domestic rivals and Group B runners-up Zobahan.

Finalists in 2010, Zobahan had edged a tight first leg 1-0 in Isfahan but Mame Thiam's hat-trick at Azadi Stadium helped Esteghlal secure a return to the quarter-finals for the first time since 2013 and ensured there will be two Tehran sides in the latter stages of the competition.

Group Stage																															
Group A								Group B								Group C								Group D							
	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/- Pts		P	W	D	L	F	A	+/- Pts		P	W	D	L	F	A	+/- Pts		P	W	D	L	F	A	+/- Pts
Al Ahli	6	4	2	0	9	4	5 14	Al Duhail	6	6	0	0	13	6	7 18	Persepolis	6	4	1	1	8	3	5 13	Esteghlal	6	3	3	0	9	5	4 12
Al Jazira	6	2	2	2	9	9	0 8	Zobahan	6	2	1	3	6	8 -2 7	Al Sadd	6	4	0	2	11	5	6 12	Al Ain	6	2	4	0	10	6	4 10	
Al Gharafa	6	2	2	2	12	9	3 8	Lokomotiv	6	2	1	3	13	9	4 7	Nasaf	6	3	1	2	4	8 -4 10	Al Rayyan	6	1	3	2	7	11 -4 6		
Tractorsazi Tabriz	6	0	2	4	2	10	-8 2	Al Wahda	6	1	0	5	6	15 -9 3	Al Wasl	6	0	0	6	3	10 -7 0	Al Hilal	6	0	2	4	3	7 -4 2			
12/02/18 Al Jazira 3 (Romarinho 10, Ali Mabkhout 27, Ahmed Al Attas 69) Al Gharafa 2 (Mehdi Taremi 11, Wesley Sneijder 71) Tractorsazi Tabriz 0 Al Ahli 1 (Muhammad Assiri 67) 19/02/18 Al Gharafa 3 (Mehdi Taremi 11, 90+4, Sime Gregov 21 OG) Tractorsazi Tabriz 0 Ah Ahli 2 (Taiseer Al Jassam 10, Muhammad Assiri 70 pen) Al Jazira 1 (Ali Mabkhout 89) 05/03/18 Al Jazira 0 Tractorsazi Tabriz 0 Al Gharafa 1 (Rubert Quijada 90+1) Al Ahli 1 (Aqeel Balghaith 62) 13/03/18 Tractorsazi Tabriz 1 (Farzad Hatami 78) Al Jazira 1 (Romarinho 44) Al Ahli 1 (Moamen Zakaria 58) Al Gharafa 1 (Mehdi Taremi 56) 03/04/18 Al Gharafa 2 (Ahmed Alaeldin 28, Diogo Amado 44) Al Jazira 3 (Romarinho 14, Ali Mabkhout 70, 90+4) Al Ahli 2 (Muhammad Assiri 49, Moamen Zakaria 90+2) Tractorsazi Tabriz 0 17/04/18 Al Jazira 1 (Romarinho 68) Al Ahli 2 (Saleh Al Amri 6, Moamen Zakaria 30) Tractorsazi Tabriz 1 (Mohammad Iranpourian 31 pen) Al Gharafa 3 (Moayad Hassan 70, Abdulaziz Hatem 76, Mehdi Taremi 87)								12/02/18 Lokomotiv 5 (Nivaldo 25, Ikromjon Alibaev 53, 87, Salem Sultan 55 OG, Sardor Rashidov 59) Al Wahda 0 Al Duhail 3 (Karim Bou diaf 74, 76, Youssef Msakni 84) Zobahan 1 (Kiros 12) 19/02/18 Zobahan 2 (Morteza Tabrizi 47, Mohammadreza Hosseini 90+2) Lokomotiv 0 Al Wahda 2 (Sebastian Taghibue 4 pen, Mourad Batna 90+3 pen) Al Duhail 3 (Youssef El Arabi 57, 80, Karim Bou diaf 75) 06/03/18 Zobahan 2 (Morteza Tabrizi 34, 73) Al Wahda 0 Al Duhail 3 (Youssef El Arabi 9, 19, Youssef Msakni 25) Lokomotiv 2 (Nivaldo 57, Marat Bikmeyer 59) 12/03/18 Lokomotiv 1 (Sardor Rashidov 35) Al Duhail 2 (Youssef El Arabi 90+1, 90+4) Al Wahda 3 (Sebastian Taghibue 45+1, Mourad Batna 57, Mohamed Al Akbari 65) Zobahan 0 03/04/18 Zobahan 0 Al Duhail 1 (Ismail Mohammad 84) Al Wahda 1 (Khaled Ibrahim 88) Lokomotiv 4 (Sardor Mirzaev 4, 39, Sanjar Shaakhmedov 55, Ahmed Rashed 89 OG) 17/04/18 Al Duhail 1 (Abdurahman Mostafa 47) Al Wahda 0 Lokomotiv 1 (Islom Tukhtahujayev 90) Zobahan 1 (Morteza Tabrizi 25)								13/02/18 Persepolis 3 (Goodwin Mensha 20, Ali Alipour 66, 71) Nasaf 0 Al Wasl 1 (Fabio Lima 26) Al Sadd 2 (Baghdad Bounedjah 79, 90) 20/02/18 Nasaf 1 (Igor Golban 57) Al Wasl 0 Al Sadd 3 (Baghdad Bounedjah 36, 51, Boualem Khoukhi 66) Persepolis 1 (Siamak Nemati 90+4) 05/03/18 Nasaf 1 (Asizjon Ganiev 36 pen) Al Sadd 0 Persepolis 2 (Farshad Ahmadzadeh 36, Ali Alipour 41 pen) Al Wasl 0 13/03/18 Al Sadd 4 (Xavi 3, Abdelkarim Hassan 15, Baghdad Bounedjah 43, Jugurtha Hamroun 71) Nasaf 0 Al Wasl 0 Persepolis 1 (Kamal Kamyabinia 37) 02/04/18 Nasaf 0 Persepolis 0 Al Sadd 2 (Baghdad Bounedjah 9, 53) Al Wasl 1 (Caio 90+2) 16/04/18 Persepolis 1 (Morteza Pouraliganji 3 OG) Al Sadd 0 Al Wasl 1 (Fabio Lima 33) Nasaf 2 (Sharof Mukhtidinov 45+2, Bobir Abdizolnikov 48)								13/02/18 Al Rayyan 2 (Abderrazak Hamdallah 18, Rodrigo Tabata 28) Esteghlal 2 (Rodrigo Tabata 6 OG, Ali Ghorbani 88) Al Hilal 0 Al Ain 0 20/02/18 Al Ain 1 (Marcus Berg 10 pen) Al Rayyan 1 (Abderrazak Hamdallah 28 pen) Esteghlal 1 (Mame Baba Thiam 46) Al Hilal 0 06/03/18 Al Ain 2 (Marcus Berg 63, Ahmed Khalil 89 pen) Esteghlal 2 (Mame Baba Thiam 52, 77) Al Hilal 1 (Abdullah Al Zori 58) Al Rayyan 1 (Mouhcine Moutouali 3) 12/03/18 Al Rayyan 2 (Abderrazak Hamdallah 44 pen, Rodrigo Tabata 66) Al Hilal 1 (Yasser Al Qahtani 90 pen) Esteghlal 1 (Mame Baba Thiam 42 pen) Al Ain 1 (Tsukasa Shiotani 78) 02/04/18 Al Ain 2 (Marcus Berg 40 pen, 45+2 pen) Al Hilal 1 (Mohammed Al Breik 7) Esteghlal 2 (Server Djeparov 4, Voria Ghafouri 58 pen) Al Rayyan 0 16/04/18 Al Hilal 0 Esteghlal 1 (Voria Ghafouri 36) Al Rayyan 1 (Sebastien Soric 85) Al Ain 4 (Hussein El Shahat 11, Omar Abdulrahman 55, Marcus Berg 58, 78)							
Group E								Group F								Group G								Group H							
	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/- Pts		P	W	D	L	F	A	+/- Pts		P	W	D	L	F	A	+/- Pts		P	W	D	L	F	A	+/- Pts
Jeonbuk	6	5	0	1	22	9	13 15	Shanghai SIPG	6	3	2	1	10	6 4 11	Guangzhou	6	3	3	0	12	6 6 12	Suwon	6	3	1	2	8	7 1 10			
Tianjin Quanjian	6	4	1	1	15	11	4 13	Ulsan Hyundai	6	2	3	1	15	11 4 9	Buriram United	6	2	3	1	7	6 1 9	Kashima Antlers	6	2	3	1	8	6 2 9			
Kashiwa Reysol	6	1	1	4	6	10 -4 4	Melbourne Victory	6	2	2	2	11	16 -5 8	Cerezo Osaka	6	2	2	2	6	8 -2 8	Sydney FC	6	1	3	2	7	8 -1 6				
Kitchee SC	6	1	0	5	1	14 -13 3	Kawasaki Frontale	6	0	3	3	6	9 -3 3	Jeju United	6	1	0	5	6	11 -5 3	Shanghai Shenhua	6	0	5	1	6	8 -2 5				
13/02/18 Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors 3 (Lee Dong-gook 55, 84, Kim Jin-su 75) Kashiwa Reysol 2 (Ricardo Lopes 10, Ataru Esaka 27) Tianjin Quanjian 3 (Anthony Modeste 32, Paulinho 36 OG, Sun Ke 39) Kitchee SC 0 20/02/18 Kashiwa Reysol 1 (Cristiano 52) Tianjin Quanjian 1 (Alexandre Pato 88) Kitchee 0 Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors 6 (Adriano 6 pen, 14, 45+1 pen, Kim Jin-su 25, Tiago Alves 32, Lee Dong-gook 90+3) 06/03/18 Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors 6 (Kim Shin-wook 24, 60, 64, Han Kyo-won 42, Ricardo Lopes 56, Choi Bo-kyung 72) Tianjin Quanjian 3 (Zhang Cheng 10, Zhao Xuri 79, Alexandre Pato 89 pen) Kashiwa Reysol 1 (Junya Ito 66) Kitchee SC 0 14/03/18 Kitchee SC 1 (Cheng Chin Lung 90+2) Kashiwa Reysol 0 Tianjin Quanjian 4 (Wang Yongpo 8, Zhang Cheng 55, Anthony Modeste 84, Alexandre Pato 90+3) Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors 2 (Kim Shin-wook 37, Adriano 67) 04/04/18 Kashiwa Reysol 0 Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors 2 (Ricardo Lopes 16, Lee Dong-gook 77) Kitchee SC 0 Tianjin Quanjian 1 (Anthony Modeste 89) 18/04/18 Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors 3 (Lee Seung-gi 72, Kim Shin-wook 79, Lim Sun-young 87) Kitchee SC 0 Tianjin Quanjian 3 (Zhao Xuri 24, 30, Yang Xu 64) Kashiwa Reysol 2 (Kei Koizumi 39, Yusuke Segawa 69)								13/02/18 Melbourne Victory 3 (Leroy George 26, 37, Rhys Williams 54) Ulsan Hyundai 3 (Mislav Orsic 24, 51, Richard Windbichler 34) Kawasaki Frontale 0 Shanghai SIPG 1 (Elkeson 23) 20/02/18 Ulsan Hyundai 2 (Jung Jae-yong 42, Lee Yeong-jae 66) Kawasaki Frontale 1 (Kei Chinen 85) Shanghai SIPG 4 (Hulk 27 pen, Wu Lei 41, Oscar 47, 77) Melbourne Victory 1 (Besart Berisha 69 pen) 07/03/18 Kawasaki Frontale 2 (Elsinho 28, Kyohei Noborizato 55) Melbourne Victory 2 (Besart Berisha 36, Leroy George 90+3 pen) Shanghai SIPG 2 (Oscar 38, 70) Ulsan Hyundai 2 (Richard Windbichler 37, Kim In-sung 68) 13/03/18 Melbourne Victory 1 (Kosta Barbarouses 90) Kawasaki Frontale 0 Ulsan Hyundai 0 Shanghai SIPG 1 (Elkeson 50) 04/04/18 Ulsan Hyundai 6 (Junior Negrao 12, 67, Lim jung-eun 20, Mislav Orsic 38, 75, Kim Seung-jun 55) Melbourne Victory 2 (Kenjok Ahtifu 72, Kosta Bararouses 74) Shanghai SIPG 1 (Elkeson 68) Kawasaki Frontale (Kei Chinen 74) 18/04/18 Kawasaki Frontale 2 (Yuto Suzuki 2, Tatsuya Hasegawa 43) Ulsan Hyundai 2 (Park Jong-woo 47, Lee Yeong-jae 50) Melbourne Victory 2 (Pierce Waring 40, Jai Ingham 68) Shanghai SIPG 1 (Lin Chuangyi 45)								14/02/18 Guangzhou Evergrande 1 (Ricardo Goulart 16) Buriram United 1 (Edgar 57) Jeju United 0 Cerezo Osaka 1 (Kota Mizunuma 90+3) 21/02/18 Cerezo Osaka 0 Guangzhou Evergrande 0 Buriram United 0 Jeju United 2 (Lee Chang-min 2, Magno Cruz 21 pen) 06/03/18 Buriram United 2 (Andres Tunez 2, Edgar 54) Cerezo Osaka 0 Guangzhou Evergrande 5 (Alan 45+4, Ricardo Goulart 4 52, 57 pen, 86, 90+2) Jeju United 3 (Jin Seong-uk 20, Magno Cruz 29, Lee Chang-min 90+3) 14/03/18 Cerezo Osaka 2 (Yang Dong-hyun 65, Kenyu Sugimoto 88) Buriram United 2 (Yang Dong-hyun 11 OG, Diogo 71) Jeju United 0 Guangzhou Evergrande 2 (Nemanja Gudelj 27, Alan 37) 03/04/18 Cerezo Osaka 2 (Eiichi Katayama 16, Yoichiro Kakitani 34) Jeju United 1 (Jin Seong-uk 90+2) Buriram United 1 (Yoo Jun-soo 90+2) Guangzhou Evergrande 1 (Zheng Long 20) 17/04/18 Guangzhou Evergrande 3 (Huang Bowen 6, Alan 57, 86) Cerezo Osaka 1 (Takaki Fukamitsu 10) Jeju United 0 Buriram United 1 (Korratok Wiriyado-msiri 54)								14/02/18 Sydney FC 0 Suwon Samsung Bluewings 2 (Dejan Damjanovic 62, 76 pen) Kashima Antlers 1 (Yasushi Endo 51) Shanghai Shenhua 1 (Giovanni Moreno 3) 21/02/18 Suwon Samsung Bluewings 1 (Cristovam 89) Kashima Antlers 2 (Mu Kanazaki 8, 59) Shanghai Shenhua 2 (Obafemi Martins 26, Fredy Guarin 39) Sydney FC 2 (Luke Wilkshire 28, Alex Brosque 34) 07/03/18 Sydney FC 0 Kashima Antlers 2 (Shoma Doi 40, Naomichi 87) Suwon Samsung Bluewings 1 (Lee Ki-je 47) Shnhaghi Shenhua 1 (Giovanni Moreno 71 pen) 13/03/18 Kashima Antlers 1 (Mu Kanazaki 27) Sydney FC 1 (Matt Simon 70) Shanghai Shenhua 0 Suwon Samsung Bluewings 2 (Dejan Damjanovic 51, Choi Sung-keun 88) 03/04/18 Suwon Samsung Bluewings 1 (Dejan Damjanovic 24) Sydney FC 4 (Milos Ninkovic 23, Alex Brosque 31, Adrian Mierzejewski 79, Bobo 90+1) Shanghai Shenhua 2 (Giovanni Moreno 13 pen, Mao Jian-qing 28) Kashima Antlers 2 (Yuma Suzuki 58, Leandro 63) 17/04/18 Sydney FC 0 Shanghai Shenhua 0 Kashima Antlers 0 Suwon Samsung Bluewings 1 (Dejan Damjanovic 31)							
Round of 16																															
07/05/18 Al Jazira 3 (Ali Mabkhout 52, Romarinho 77, Khalifa Al Hammadi 90+6) Persepolis 2 (Ali Alipour 42, Godwin Mensha 84 pen) 14/05/18 Persepolis 2 (Ahmad Nourollahi 63, Jalal Hosseini 89) Al Jazira 1 (Romarinho 70)								07/05/18 Al Sadd 2 (Boualem Khoukhi 3, 28) Al Ahli 1 (Muhammad Assiri 47) 14/05/18 Al Ahli 2 (Claudemir 9, Muhammad Assiri 39) Al Sadd 2 (Baghdad Bounedjah 2, 70)								08/05/18 Tianjin Quanjian 0 Guangzhou Evergrande 0 15/05/18 Guangzhou Evergrande 2 (Ricardo Goulart 17, 48) Tianjin Quanjian 2 (Alexandre Pato 19, Wang Jie 52)								09/05/18 Ulsan Hyundai 1 (Kim In-sung 67) Suwon Samsung Bluewings 0 16/05/18 Suwon Samsung Bluewings 3 (Kim Gun-hee 26, 31, Waguinho 90+1) Ulsan Hyundai 0							
Persepolis win on away goals after 4-4 aggregate draw								Al Sadd win 4-3 on aggregate								Tianjin win on away goals after 2-2 aggregate draw								Suwon win 3-1 on aggregate							
08/05/18 Zobahan 1 (Giorgi Gvetsiani 90+3) Esteghlal 0 15/05/18 Esteghlal 3 (Mame Thiam 11 pen, 41, 64) Zobahan 1 (Ghasem Haddadifar 65)								08/05/18 Al Ain 2 (Ahmed Khalil 68, Ibrahim Diaky 86) Al Duhail 4 (Youssef El Arabi 16, Nam Tae-hee 39, Ismail Mohammad 48, Almoez Ali 55) 15/05/18 Al Duhail 4 (Mohamed Ahmed 12 OG, Youssef El Arabi 30, 86 pen, Ismail Mohammad 54) Al Ain 1 (Omar Abdulrahman 90+4)								08/05/18 Buriram United 3 (Edgar Silva 6, 69, Diogo 60) Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors 2 (Ricardo Lopes 50, Son Jun-ho 90+1) 15/05/18 Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors 2 (Ricardo Lopes 18, Lee Jae-sung 84) Buriram United 0								09/05/18 Kashima Antlers 3 (Yuma Suzuki 43, Daigo Nishi 49, Yu Hai 75 OG) Shanghai SIPG 1 (Elkeson 77) 16/05/18 Shanghai SIPG 2 (Hulk 7, 81 pen) Kashima Antlers 1 (Shoma Doi 42)							
Esteghlal win 3-2 on aggregate								Al Duhail win 8-3 on aggregate								Jeonbuk win 4-3 on aggregate								Kashima win 4-3 on aggregate							



Air Force Club On Course For Third Title

Defending AFC Cup champions Air Force Club of Iraq remain on course for an unprecedented third successive title after advancing to the West Asia Zonal final, where they will meet Jordan's Al Jazeera.

Elsewhere, Singapore's Home United and Ceres Negros of the Philippines will face off in the ASEAN Zonal final, while 2016 runners-up JSW Bengaluru return to the Inter-Zone semi-finals for the second year in a row alongside Turkmenistan's Altyn Asyr and 4.25 SC of DPR Korea.

Having won the past two editions of the continental competition, Air Force Club began the 2018 campaign in Group A but, despite remaining unbeaten in their six games, finished second behind Al Jazeera. The holders, however, progressed to the West Asia Zonal semi-finals as the best-placed runner-up.

Air Force Club were then drawn against Group B winners Al Ahed of Lebanon and posted a 3-1 win in the first leg after goals from Amjad Radhi, Hammadi Ahmed and a Salih Sadir penalty.

A late Al Ahed goal in the first meeting gave the Beirut side hope ahead of the return leg, but first-half goals from Ahmad and Emad Mohsin killed the tie as a 2-2 draw saw the defending champions advance 5-3 on aggregate.

Group A winners Al Jazeera booked a West Asia Zonal semi-final date with fellow Jordanian side and Group C table-toppers Al Faisaly.

After the first leg ended 1-1, Musa Al Taamari sealed Al Jazeera's progression in the return meeting, with the Jordan international netting the only goal of the game.

In the ASEAN Zone, Home United pipped Ceres Negros to top spot in Group F by winning in the Philippines in the final group game, but both teams progressed to the Zonal semi-finals.

Myanmar's Yangon United had finished convincing winners of Group G after finishing five points clear at the top to book a date with Ceres.

The Filipino hosts had raced into the three-goal lead by half-time of the first leg, with Bienvenido Maranon netting twice, but Sekou Sylla gave Yangon plenty of hope ahead of the second leg as the Guinean scored a brace and the game ended 4-2.

Kosuke Yamazaki gave Yangon an early advantage in Myanmar but Manny Ott leveled soon after before Maranon gave Ceres the lead with 12 minutes to play. Aee Soe and Sylla made it 3-2 to Yangon but Ceres held out to advance.

Persija Jakarta had set record attendances in the AFC Cup with more than 60,000 turning out for their Group H win over Johor Darul Ta'zim as the Indonesian side eventually progressed.

But an own-goal by Maman Abdurrahman and a Song Ui-young strike saw them two down inside 10 minutes against Home United in the first leg of their



ASEAN Zonal semi-final in Singapore. Ramdani Lestaluhu's double restored parity but Mohammad Hafiz claimed a 3-2 win for the hosts.

A record 62,198 showed up at Gelora Bung Karno Stadium for the second leg, but Shahril Ishak's early double and Song's seventh of the campaign had the visitors 3-1 up at the interval as they progressed 6-3 on aggregate.

In the Central Zone, two-time runners-up FC Istiklol of Tajikistan were favourites to qualify from Group D, but faced a strong challenge from Turkmenistan's Altyn Asyr.

The Turkmen side went into the final group game against Istiklol in Tajikistan two points adrift.

Akhtam Nazarov's stoppage-time penalty made it 2-2 to seemingly save Istiklol, only for Mihail Titov to strike at the death and seal a stunning 3-2 victory for Altyn Asyr and a place in the next round.

Elsewhere, South Asia Zone heavyweights Bengaluru and New Radiant were level in Group E, but the Maldivian side's marginally better head-to-head record meant they went into the final game with qualification in their hands.

But a 2-1 defeat to India's Aizawl FC allowed Bengaluru to claim top spot following their 4-0 victory over Bangladesh's Abahani Limited Dhaka to mean the 2016 runners-up will face Altyn Asyr.

Finally, An Il Bom scored in each of 4.25 SC's first five games as the DPR Korea side stormed into the knockout rounds by topping Group I.

An failed to make it a perfect six, but his side did complete the feat as 4.25 topped the standings six points clear of second-placed Benfica Macau. The East Asia Zonal champions will next play Home United or Ceres Negros.

Group A									
	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/–	Pts	
Al Jazeera	6	4	2	0	13	6	7	14	
Air Force Club	6	3	3	0	11	7	4	12	
Malkiya Club	6	2	1	3	11	10	1	7	
Al Suwaiq	6	0	0	6	4	16	-12	0	

12/02/18
Air Force Club 2 (Hammadi Ahmed 16 pen, Salih Sadir 84) Al Jazeera 2 (Musa Al Taamari 26 pen, Mardik Mardikian 88 pen)
Malkiya Club 4 (Sayed Hashem 21, Sayed Hashim Isa 32, 71, Sayed Ali Isa 81) Al Suwaiq 1 (Abdulaziz Al Muqbali 45+1)
26/02/18
Al Suwaiq 0 Air Force Club 1 (Karrar Ali 85)
Al Jazeera 1 (Musa Al Taamari 60) Malkiya Club 0
05/03/18
Al Suwaiq 2 (Abdoulaye Dieng 33 pen, Khalid Al Hajri 41) Al Jazeera 3 (Yazan Abu Arab 43, Mohammad Tannous 67, Musa Al Taamari 70 pen)
Malkiya Club 3 (Isa Al Bari 8, 9, Israa Hamwiah 14)
Air Force Club 4 (Zaher Midani, Amjad Radhi 70, 90+1, Hammadi Ahmad 79)
13/03/18
Al Jazeera 4 (Mohannad Khairullah 39, Oday Al Jafal 41, Ahmad Essawi 45+3, Mohammad Tannous 85) Al Suwaiq 0
10/04/18
Al Suwaiq 1 (Khalid Al Hajri 60) Malkiya Club 2 (Sayed Hashim Isa 12, Israa Hamwiah 89 pen)
Al Jazeera 1 (Ahmad Al Essawi 88) Air Force Club 1 (Amjad Radhi 90+3)
17/04/18
Air Force Club 1 (Emad Mohsin 20) Malkiya Club 1 (Israa Hamwiah 77)
24/04/18
Malkiya Club 1 (Welid Al Tayeb 38) Al Jazeera 2 (Musa Al Taamari 21 pen, Mardik Mardikian 56)
Air Force Club 2 (Amjad Radhi 37, 45 pen) Al Suwaiq 0

Group Stage									
Group B									
	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/–	Pts	
Al Ahed	6	3	3	0	11	5	6	12	
Al Zawraa	6	2	4	0	8	5	3	10	
Al Jaish	6	1	4	1	4	6	-2	7	
Manama Club	6	0	1	5	3	10	-7	1	
12/02/18 Al Ahed 1 (Issah Yakubu 67) Al Zawraa 1 (Safaa Hadi 4) Manama Club 0 Al Jaish 0 26/02/18 Al Zawraa 0 Al Jaish 0 Manama Club 0 Al Ahed 1 (Ahmad Zreik 70) 06/03/18 Al Ahed 1 (Ahmad Zreik 71) Al Jaish 1 (Hasan Al Owied 56) 12/03/18 Manama Club 1 (Mahmood Abdulrahman 1) Al Zawraa 3 (Mohammad Abdulraheem 15, Haider Abdulameer 66, Amjad Kalaf 79) Al Jaish 1 (Radwan Kalaji 90 pen) Al Ahed 4 (Idrissa Kouyate 24, Ahmad Zreik 45+2, 60, Samir Ayass 90+3) 10/04/18 Al Zawraa 1 (Hussein Al Saedi 82 pen) Al Ahed 1 (Ahmad Zreik 90+5) Al Jaish 1 (Mohamad Kalaji 45) Manama Club 0 16/04/18 Al Zawraa 2 (Mustafa Jawda 40, Ibrahim Bayeshi 47) Manama Club 1 (Ali Haram 90) 24/04/18 Al Ahed 3 (Idrissa Kouyate 40, Nour Mansour 54, Ahmad Zreik 90+6) Manama Club 1 (Ali Haram 90) Al Jaish 1 (Ahmad Ashkar 90+4) Al Zawraa 1 (Mohammad Abdulraheem 62)									
Group C									
	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/–	Pts	
Al Faisaly	6	4	1	1	10	5	5	13	
Dhofar Club	6	2	2	2	4	5	-1	8	
Al Ansar	6	2	1	3	6	7	-1	7	
Al Wahda	6	1	2	3	5	8	-3	5	
13/02/18 Dhofar Club 0 Al Ansar 2 (Hassan Chaito 9, Alaa El Baba 90+1) Al Faisaly 2 (Lukasz Gikiewicz 74, Yousef Al Rawashdeh 82) Al Wahda 2 (Bassel Moustafe 7, 80) 27/02/18 Al Wahda 0 Dhofar Club 0 Al Ansar 1 (El Hadji Malick Tall 48) Al Faisaly 3 (Dominique Mendy 7, Ahmad Hayel 39, Khalil Attiah 88) 05/03/18 Al Wahda 2 (Bassel Moustafa 37, Mohammad Al Hasan 60) Al Ansar 1 (El Hadji Malick Tall 12) Al Faisaly 2 (Anas Bani Yaseen 43, Lukasz Gikiewicz 49) Dhofar Club 0 13/03/18 Al Ansar 1 (El Hadji Malick Tall 47) Al Wahda 0 Dhofar Club 1 (Qasim Said 40) Al Faisaly 0 09/04/18 Al Wahda 1 (Solaiman Solaiman 78) Al Faisaly 2 (Lukasz Gikiewicz 40, Anas Al Jbarat Al Ansar 1 (Thaer Krouma 17) Dhofar Club 1 (Hugo Lopez 15) 23/04/18 Al Faisaly 1 (Alban Meha 15) Al Ansar 0 Dhofar Club 2 (Vinicius Calamari 68, 89) Al Wahda 0									
Group D									
	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/–	Pts	
Altyn Asyr	6	4	2	0	17	7	10	14	
FC Istiklol	6	4	1	1	10	7	3	13	
FC Ahal	6	2	1	3	8	5	3	7	
FC Alay	6	0	0	6	7	23	-16	0	
07/03/18 FC Alay 3 (Ilyaz Alimov 39, Kozho Joel 45, Maksadbek Alimov 57) Altyn Asyr 6 (Myrat Yagysyev 11, 51, Altymyrat Annadurdyev 19, 40, 84, Begmyrat Bayov 88) FC Istiklol 1 (Guycmyrat Annageldiyev 25 OG) FC Ahal 0 13/03/18 FC Ahal 5 (Suleyman Muhadov 27, 33, Guwanc Abylov 36, 68, Nuryagdy Muhammedov 90+2) FC Alay 0 14/03/18 Altyn Asyr 2 (Myrat Yagysyev 90, Altymyrat Annadurdyev 90+3) FC Istiklol 2 (Mikalay Zyanko 50, Akhtam Nazarov 59 pen) 11/04/18 FC Ahal 0 Altyn Asyr 0 FC Istiklol 1 (Fatkhullo Fatkhuloev 48 pen) FC Alay 0 25/04/18 FC Alay 2 (Ulugbek Riskulov 38, Alia Sylla 76 pen) FC Istiklol 3 (Fatkhullo Fatkhuloev 7 pen, Romish Jalilov 45, Dilshod Vasiev 90+2) Altyn Asyr 1 (Serdar Geldiyev 45+2) FC Ahal 0 01/05/18 FC Ahal 0 FC Istiklol 1 (Fatkhullo Fatkhuloev 52) Altyn Asyr 5 (Mekan Asyrov 7, Altymyrat Annadurdyev 25, 90+1, Myrat Yagysyev 60, 69 pen) FC Alay 0 16/05/18 FC Alay 2 (Alia Sylla 17 pen, Shohmurad Mansurov 23) FC Ahal 3 (Myrat Annayev 42 pen, Guycmyrat Annageldiyev 66, Begenc Akmammedov 90+3 pen) FC Istiklol 2 (Mikalay Zyanko 83, Akhtam Nazarov 90+1 pen) Altyn Asyr 3 (Furkat Tursunov 1, Zafar Babajanov 45+4, Mihail Titov 90+7)									
Group E									
	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/–	Pts	
JSW Bengaluru	6	5	0	1	14	3	11	15	
New Radiant SC	6	4	0	2	12	5	7	12	
Abahani Dhaka Limited	6	1	1	4	5	12	-7	4	
Aizawl FC	6	1	1	4	5	16	-11	4	
07/03/18 Abahani Dhaka Limited 0 New Radiant SC 1 (Ali Fasir 58) 14/03/18 New Radiant SC 3 (Ali Ashfaq 40, 77, 85) Aizawl FC 1 (Lalkhawpuimawia 33) JSW Bengaluru 1 (Daniel Lalhlhimpuia 72) Abahani Dhaka Limited 0 05/04/18 Aizawl FC 1 (Leonce Dodoz 5) JSW Bengaluru 3 (Daniel Segovia 45+1, Rahul Bheke 63, Daniel Lalhlhimpuia 77) 10/04/18 JSW Bengaluru 1 (Nishu Kumar 90+1) New Radiant SC 0 Aizawl FC 0 Abahani Dhaka Limited 3 (Rubel Miya 2, Ndakaku Alison 17, Seiya Kojima 37) 25/04/18 Abahani Dhaka Limited 1 (Emeka Onuoha 31 pen) Aizawl FC 1 (Andrei Ionescu 65) New Radiant SC 2 (Ali Fasir 30, Ali Ashfaq 47) JSW Bengaluru 0 02/05/18 New Radiant SC 5 (Ali Fasir 19 pen, 51, 56, Ali Ashfaq 58, 88) Abahani Dhaka Limited 1 (Seiya Kojima 46) JSW Bengaluru 5 (Sunil Chhetri 16 pen, Daniel Segovia 17, 62, Udanta Singh 30, Daniel Lalhlhimpuia 89) Aizawl FC 0 16/05/18 Aizawl FC 2 (Leonce Dodoz 61 pen, Andrei Ionescu 82) New Radiant SC 1 (Ibrahim Hassan 85) Abahani Dhaka Limited 0 JSW Bengaluru 4 (Daniel Segovia 13, Nishu Kumar 16, 58, Sunil Chhetri 60)									

Group F									
	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/–	Pts	
Home United	6	4	1	1	15	6	9	13	
Ceres Negros	6	4	1	1	17	3	14	13	
Boeung Ket FC	6	2	0	4	8	24	-16	6	
Shan United	6	1	0	5	5	12	-7	3	
13/02/18 Shan United 0 Home United 1 (Song Ui-young 75) Ceres Negros 9 (Takumi Uesato 15, 22, Bienvenido Maranon 19, 29 pen, Oj Porteria 31, 85, Sun Sovannarith 58 OG, Carli de Murga 64, Mamt Ott 81) Boeung Ket FC 0 27/02/18 Boeung Ket FC 1 (Maicon 28) Shan United 2 (Ko Chit 41, Christopher Chizoba 55) Home United 1 (Shahril Ishak 23 pen) Ceres Negros 1 (Manuel Herrera 79) 06/03/18 Boeung Ket FC 3 (Maicon 11, 41 pen, Samuel Ajayi 13) Home United 2 (Song Ui-young 2, Faritz Hameed 67) Ceres Negros 2 (Patrick Reichelt 79, Bienvenido Maranon 83) Shan United 0 14/03/18 Shan United 0 Ceres Negros 1 (Bienvenido Maranon 14 pen) Home United 6 (Shahril Ishak 37, Song Ui-young 44, Faritz Hameed 55, Anumanthan Kumar 72, 83, Izzdin Shafiq 87) Boeung Ket FC 0 11/04/18 Boueng Ket FC 0 Ceres Negros 4 (Bienvenido Maranon 36, 38, 69, Takumi Uesato 84) Home United 3 (Faizal Roslan 19, Song Ui-young 25, Shahril Ishak 39) Shan United 2 (Zin Min Tun 9, Christopher Chizoba 28) 25/04/18 Ceres Negros 0 Home United 2 (Izzdin Shafiq 80, Song Ui-young 90+4 pen) Shan United 1 (Zin Min Tun 78) Boueng Ket FC 4 (Maicon 11, 63, Julius Oiboh 25, Samuel Ajayi 47)									
Group G									
	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/–	Pts	
Yangon United	6	4	1	1	15	9	6	13	
Global Cebu	6	2	2	2	9	10	-1	8	
FLC Thanh Hoa	6	1	3	2	9	11	-2	6	
Bali United	6	1	2	3	8	11	-3	5	
10/02/18 FLC Thanh Hoa 1 (Pape Omar Faye 74) Global Cebu 0 Bali United 1 (Gede Sukadana 45+1) Yangon United 3 (Emmanuel Uzochukwu 15, Sekou Sylla 18, 25) 27/02/18 Yangon United 2 (Kosuke Uchida 67, Aee Soe 87) FLC Thanh Hoa 1 (Pape Omar Faye 5) Global Cebu 1 (Curt Dizon 11) Bali United 1 (Ilija Spasojevic 74) 07/03/18 Bali United 3 (Yabes Roni 66, Demerson 72, Stefano Lilipaly 74) FLC Thanh Hoa 1 (Ryutaro Karube 30) Yangon United 3 (Maung Maung Lwin 45+3, Sekou Sylla 48, 57) Global Cebu 0 13/03/18 FLC Thanh Hoa 0 Bali United 0 Global Cebu 2 (Darryl Roberts 79, Rufo Sanchez 90+5) Yangon United 1 (Maung Maung Lwin 90) 11/04/18 Yangon United 3 (Maung Maung Lwin 44, Emmanuel Uzochukwu 58, Sekou Sylla 73) Bali United 2 (Ilija Spasojevic 11, Nyoman Sukaria 36) Global Cebu 3 (Rufo Sanchez 6, Wesley dos Santos 82, Darryl Roberts 90) FLC Thanh Hoa 3 (Edward Ofere 2, Le Thanh Binh 25, Hoang Diinh Tung 57) 25/04/18 Bali United 1 (Nick van der Velden 71) Global Cebu 3 (Rufo Sanchez 2, 45+1, Paul Mulders 33) FLC Thanh Hoa 3 (Pape Omar Faye 11, Le Van Thang 38, Ryutaro Karube 80) Yangon United 3 (Sekou Sylla 4, 22, Thein Zaw 61)									
Group H									
	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/–	Pts	
Persija Jakarta	6	4	1	1	13	6	7	13	
Song Lam Nghe An	6	3	1	2	8	5	3	10	
Johor Darul Ta'zim	6	3	1	2	8	9	-1	10	
Tampines Rovers	6	0	1	5	5	14	-9	1	
10/02/18 Tampines Rovers 0 Song Lam Nghe An 2 (Ho Phuc Tinh 49, Ho Khac Ngoc 71) 14/02/18 Johor Darul Ta'zim 3 (Hazwan Bakri 29, Pereyra Diaz 42, Safawi Rasid 76) Persija Jakarta 0 28/02/18 Song Lam Nghe An 2 (Phan Van Duc 22, Pham Xuan Manh 90+4) Johor Darul Ta'zim 0 Persija Jakarta 4 (Marko Simic 12, 74, 86, Rezaldi Hehanusa 41) Tampines Rovers 1 (Khairul Amri 77) 06/03/18 Song Lam Nghe An 0 Persija Jakarta 0 Tampines Rovers 0 Johor Darul Ta'zim 0 14/03/18 Persija Jakarta 1 (Addison 90+3) Song Lam Nghe An 0 Johor Darul Ta'zim 2 (Safawi Rasid 13, Hazwan Bakri 79) Tampines Rovers 1 (Khairul Amri 45 pen) 10/04/18 Song Lam Nghe An 2 (Michael Olaha 16, Ho Tuan Tai 75) Tampines Rovers (Irfan Najeeb 38) Persija Jakarta 4 (Marko Simic 8, 12, 19, 87 pen) Johor Darul Ta'zim 0 24/04/18 Tampines Rovers 2 (Jordan Webb 27, Fazzul Nawaz 80) Persija Jakarta 4 (Rezaldi Hehanusa 23, Marko Simic 45+1, Novri Setiawan 51, Addison 72) Johor Darul Ta'zim 3 (Safawi Rasid 36, Syafiq Ahmad 39, Safiq Rahim 67 pen) Song Lam Nghe An 2 (Nguyen Viet Nguyen 41, Ho Tuan Tai 45+1)									
Group I									
	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/–	Pts	
4.25 SC	6	6	0	0	23	2	+21	18	
Benfica Macau	6	4	0	2	13	15	-2	12	
Hwaepul SC	6	2	0	4	9	10	-1	6	
Hang Yuen FC	6	0	0	6	6	24	-18	0	
07/03/18 4.25 SC 1 (An Il-bom 84) Hwaepul SC 0 Benfica Macau 3 (Gilchrist Ngueuna 49, Carlos Leonel 61, 64) Hang Yuen FC 2 (Chen Ching Hsuan 19, 34) 14/03/18 Hwaepul SC 2 (Jong Chol-hyok 13 pen, Pak Chol-song 49) Benfica Macau 3 (Carlos Leonel 7, 75, David Tetteh 45) Hang Yuen FC 1 (Liu Yung Sheng 74) 4.25 SC 5 (Om Chol-song 43, An Il-bom 45+2, 58, Rim Chol-min 55, Ri Hyong-jin 88) 10/04/18 Hwaepul SC 6 (Jon Chung-il 19, Ri Yong-gwon 36, Yen Ting-yung 50 OG, Jong Chol-hyok 58, Ri Song 72, Ri Jong-min 88) Hang Yuen FC 1 (Liu Chia Ming 55) 4.25 SC 8 (Kim Yu-song 13, 64, 77, 79, Ri Hyong-bom 21, 82, An Il-bom 55, 68) Benfica Macau 0 25/04/18 Hang Yuen FC 0 Hwaepul SC 1 (Jon Chung-il 79) Benfica Macau 0 4.25 SC 2 (An Il-bom 24, 31 pen) 02/05/18 Hwaepul SC 0 4.25 SC 2 (An Il-bom 19, Kim Yu-song 24) Hang Yuen FC 1 (Chen Ching Hsuan 19) Benfica Macau 4 (Niki Torrao 11, 89, Huang Shih Yuan 25 OG, Edgar Tezeira 77) 16/05/18 4.25 SC 5 (Lin Shih Kai 25 OG, 40 OG, Rim Chol-min 28, 77, Kim Jong-chol 34) Hang Yuen FC 1 (Jean-Marc Alexandre 26) Benfica Macau 3 (Carlos Leonel 42, 63, 82 pen) Hwaepul SC 0									





Japan Retain AFC Women's Asian Cup

Kumi Yokoyama scored six minutes from time as Japan defeated Australia 1-0 in the final of the AFC Women's Asian Cup Jordan 2018 at Amman International Stadium to retain the title they won four years ago in Vietnam.

Australia had the better of the opening stages but Elise Kellond-Knight saw her penalty saved by Ayaka Yamashita inside 15 minutes after Japan captain Saki Kumagai was adjudged to have handled.

The East Asians came back into the game however and, after Emily van Egmond had rattled the crossbar, good work from Yui Hasegawa down the left found substitute Yokoyama, who turned inside Alanna Kennedy before rifling the ball into the back of the net from just inside the area for the only goal of the game.

Asako Takakura's side, who defeated Australia by the same scoreline in the 2014 final, also advanced to the FIFA Women's World Cup in France next year alongside Australia, China, Thailand and Korea Republic as the tournament's top five teams.

Japan had earlier started the tournament, the first AFC Women's Asian Cup to ever be played in West Asia, with a 4-0 win over Vietnam in Group B, before playing out a scoreless draw

with Korea Republic.

With Australia also drawing 0-0 with the Koreans and then defeating Vietnam 8-0, a three-way battle for two semi-final places ensued in the final group games.

Korea Republic did their part by beating Vietnam 4-0 to finish on five points, meaning a victor in the game between Japan and Australia would guarantee the Koreans advanced.

But 2017 AFC Women's Player of the Year Samantha Kerr's late equaliser cancelled out Mizuho Sakaguchi's opener as the 1-1 draw between the Nadeshiko and the Matildas meant they both progressed to the last four and the Koreans had to settle for a place in the fifth-place play-off.

Hosts Jordan got off to the perfect start in Group A as Maysa Jbarah opened the scoring inside 15 minutes against the Philippines.

But the Southeast Asian debutants leveled after an own-goal from Yasmeen Khair, before Sarina Bolden scored the decisive goal.

Eight-time winners China, meanwhile, began with a 4-0 victory over Thailand, before seeing off the Philippines 3-0. Thailand's 6-1 defeat of Jordan then saw the hosts eliminated.

With China's place in the semi-finals secured, they rounded off their group stage with an 8-1 victory over Jordan as Wang Shuang scored the tournament's only hat-trick.

Thailand and the Philippines met for a place in the semi-finals and Kanjana Sungngoen

scored a brace in a 3-1 win for the Thais.

With one place at the global showpiece still to be claimed, Korea Republic defeated the Philippines in the fifth-place play-off as Jang Sel-gi, Lee Min-a, Lim Seon-joo and Cho So-hyun all scored in a 5-0 victory as their tournament ended on a high note.

Thailand pushed Australia all the way in the first semi-final. Kanjanaporn Saengkoon's own-goal handed Australia the lead inside 20 minutes but Kanjana leveled soon after and Rattikan Thongsombut put the Thais in front just after the hour.

But Kennedy popped up with an equaliser in stoppage time to force extra-time and penalties as Australia advanced.

Mana Iwabuchi opened the scoring for Japan before the interval in their semi-final with China, before substitute Yokoyama added two more in the final five minutes.

Li Ying netted a penalty at the death but it was little more than a consolation as Japan took another step towards defending their continental title.

China then finished third after Li, Wang Shanshan and Song Duan scored in a 3-1 victory over Thailand as the East Asians equaled their showing in Vietnam four years ago.

Iwabuchi was named the tournament's MVP while Li won the Top Scorer award after her seven-goal showing in Jordan.



Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
China PR	3	3	0	0	15	1	14	9
Thailand	3	2	0	1	9	6	3	6
Philippines	3	1	0	2	3	7	-4	3
Jordan	3	0	0	3	3	16	-13	0

06/04/18
China 4 (Song Duan 56, 77, Wang Shuang 63, Li Ying 67) Thailand 0
Jordan 1 (Maysa Jbarah 15) Philippines 2 (Yasmeen Khair 51 OG, Sarina Bolden 76)
09/04/18
Philippines 0 China 3 (Li Ying 17, 57, Ma Jun 31)
Thailand 6 (Suchawadee Nildhamrong 1, 69, Taneekard Dangda 6, Duangnapa Sritala 39, Kanjana Sungngoen 41, Pitsamai Sornsai 90)
Jordan 1 (Shahnaz Jebreen 43)
12/04/18
Jordan 1 (Sarah Abu Sabbah 17) China 8 (Wang Shuang 14, 53, 84, Yasmeen Khair 41 OG, Song Duan 51, Li Ying 60, 72 pen, Tang Jiali 86)
Thailand 3 (Kanjana Sungngoen 28 pen, 53, Duangnapa Sritala 62)
Philippines 1 (Jesse Shugg 90+3)

Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Australia	3	1	2	0	9	1	8	5
Japan	3	1	2	0	5	1	4	5
Korea Republic	3	1	2	0	4	0	4	5
Vietnam	3	0	0	3	0	16	-16	0

07/04/18
Japan 4 (Kumi Yokoyama 3, Emi Nakajima 17, Mana Iwabuchi 57, Mina Tanaka 66) Vietnam 0
Australia 0 Korea Republic 0
10/04/18
Korea Republic 0 Japan 0
Vietnam 0 Australia 8 (Kyah Simon 8, Alanna Kennedy 18, Chloe Logarzo 21, Emily van Egmond 28, Samantha Kerr 44, 51, Nguyen Thi Tuyet Dung 71 OG, Hayley Raso 75)
13/04/18
Japan 1 (Mizuho Sakaguchi 63) Australia 1 (Samantha Kerr 86)
Korea Republic 4 (Cho So-hyun 14, Lee Geum-min 38, Len Min-a 49, 73) Vietnam 0

Fifth-Place Play-off

16/04/18
Philippines 0 Korea Republic 5 (Jang Sel-gi 34, Lee Min-a 45+3, Lim Seon-joo 56, Cho So-hyun 66, 84 pen)

Semi-Finals

17/04/18
Australia 2 (Kanjanaporn Saengkoon 17 OG, Alanna Kennedy 90+1)
Thailand 2 (Kanjana Sungngoen 20, Rattikan Thongsombut 63)
Australia win 3-1 on penalties
China 1 (Li Ying 90 pen) Japan 3 (Mana Iwabuchi 39, Kumi Yokoyama 85, 88 pen)

Third-Place Play-Off

20/04/18
China 3 (Li Ying 51, Wang Shanshan 56, Song Duan 61)
Thailand 1 (Rattikan Thongsombut 81)

Final

20/04/18
Japan 1 (Kumi Yokoyama 84) Australia 0



IR Iran defend AFC Women's Futsal Championship

Sara Shirbeigi scored a hat-trick as the Islamic Republic of Iran retained the AFC Women's Futsal Championship following a 5-2 victory over Japan in May's final in Bangkok. After a goalless first half, Shirbeigi opened the scoring in the 27th minute, before a Misato Komura own goal doubled Iran's advantage. Shirbeigi then completed her treble with two more to all but wrap up the title. Mika Eguchi pulled one back but Fahimeh Zarei restored the Central Asians' four-goal lead, before Anna Amishiro grabbed a late consolation for Japan. Iran, though, followed in the footstep of their male counterparts as they were crowned champions of Asia. The win capped another memorable tournament for Shahrzad Mozafar's side as they won all five of their games to defend the title they won by defeating the same opponents in the final of the inaugural AFC Women's Futsal Championship in Malaysia in 2015. Iran began their tournament with a 14-0 victory over Turkmenistan in the three-team Group D as Fatehmeh Etedadi netted four goals, and Fahimeh Zarei and Fereshteh Karimi scored hat-tricks. Uzbekistan then defeated the Turkmens 3-1 to set up a top-of-the-table clash with Iran, which saw Shirbeigi score a treble in a 9-2 win for the Iranians, although both teams had already secured their passage to the quarter-finals. Hosts Thailand, meanwhile, got off to a flying start in Group A as Sasicha Phothiwong scored

five in a 15-0 victory over Macau, while Indonesia defeated Hong Kong 2-0 in the first game of the tournament. The Southeast Asian rivals then drew 1-1 on their Matchday Two meeting to leave first place in the balance, but Thailand's 8-0 win over Hong Kong saw the hosts progress on top of the standings as Indonesia finished second after seeing off Macau 9-0. Vietnam were the dominant force in Group B, beating Chinese Taipei, Bangladesh and Malaysia to qualify with a perfect three wins from three as they showed dramatic improvement from three years earlier when they lost all three of their games. Chinese Taipei joined the Vietnamese in the last eight as the East Asian debutants rebounded from their opening day defeat to claim wins over Malaysia and Bangladesh and finish second in the standings. Japan and China posted back-to-back wins over Bahrain and Lebanon to seal their places in the quarter-finals with a game to spare as the West Asian debutants were given a tough introduction to continental futsal. Amishiro then opened and closed the scoring with a hat-trick display in an entertaining 6-4 victory over the Chinese to take top spot in the group as the pair advanced to the quarter-finals. China's task for finishing second couldn't have been tougher as they were handed a date with defending champions Iran but, after falling behind early on, went 2-1 up following goals from Tian Jiao and Zhang Yue. The sides eventually went into the interval all square, before goals from Etedadi and

Shirbeigi sealed a 4-2 win for the holders and a place in the last four. Japan had few problems seeing off Uzbekistan as five different players got on the scoresheet in a 5-1 victory that saw the East Asians return to the semi-finals. A Southeast Asian clash between Vietnam and Indonesia produced the tightest quarter-final, which saw Nguyen Thi Hue net three minutes from time to secure a 2-1 win and maintain Vietnam's perfect record. And it was Thailand who secured the final semi-final place as Mutita Senkram scored three in a 6-1 victory over Chinese Taipei after the sides had gone into the interval all square. Vietnam's excellent run came to an end when they faced Iran in the semi-finals, as the defending champions showcased their quality with a superb first-half performance that all but ended the Southeast Asians' hopes of a place in the final. Arezoo Sadaghianizadeh opened the scoring after five minutes and goals from Etedadi, Shirbeigi and Zarei had the holders four goals to the good at half-time, before Shirbeigi rounded off a 5-0 victory late on. Japan joined Iran in the final for the second successive championship but only after a hard-fought game against Thailand. Ryo Egawa broke the deadlock early on but Jenjira Bubpha leveled proceedings in the second half. The Japanese would have the last laugh, though, as Masami Kato scored the winner with seven minutes to play. The hosts eventually finished in third

place after a 3-2 penalty shootout victory over Vietnam followed the tournament's only scoreless draw. Karimi picked up the AFC Women's Futsal Championship's Most Valuable Player award for the second

successive tournament. Shirbeigi won the Top Scorer accolade because of her superior assists record compared to teammate Etedadi and Japan's Amishiro after all three had finished on nine goals.



Group A									
	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts	
Thailand	3	2	1	0	24	1	23	7	
Indonesia	3	2	1	0	12	1	11	7	
Hong Kong	3	1	0	2	7	10	-3	3	
Macau	3	0	0	3	0	31	-31	0	

02/05/18
Hong Kong 0 Indonesia 2 (Febriana Kusumaningrim 33, Fitra Rosdiana 38)
Thailand 15 (Sasicha Phothiwong 2, 3, 19, 30, 31, Jiraprapa Nimrattanasing 5, Darika Peanpailun 6, 14, 16, Jenjira Bubpha 8, Mutita Senkram 20, Pacharaporn Srimuang 32, Orapin Waengngoen 35, Jiraprapa Tupsuri 37, Kuan Chi Kio 37 OG) Macau 0
04/05/18
Macau 0 Hong Kong 7 (Yuen Hoi Dik 13, 15, Yiu Hei Man 19, Ng Wing Kum 24, Cheung Wai ki 28, 38, Wong So Han 39)
Indonesia 1 (Febriana Kusumaningrim 24) Thailand 1 (Darika Peanpailun 25)
06/05/18
Thailand 8 (Jenjira Bubpha 1, 26, Mutita Senkram 2, Sasicha Phothiwong 8, 19, 30, Darika Peanpailun 33, Natthamon Artkla 40) Hong Kong 0
Indonesia 9 (Kuan Chi Kio 2 OG, Fitri Rosdiana 3, 15, 28, Rani Mulyasari 11, 21, Fitriya Hilda 25, 26, Anggi Psupitasari 33) Macau 0

Group B									
	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts	
Vietnam	3	3	0	0	11	1	10	9	
Chinese Taipei	3	2	0	1	10	4	6	6	
Malaysia	3	1	0	2	10	8	2	3	
Bangladesh	3	0	0	3	2	20	-18	0	

02/05/18
Vietnam 1 (Nguyen Thi Thanh 30) Chinese Taipei 0
Malaysia 9 (Hanis Farhana 3, Zurain Kamarudin 4, Siti Asnidah Zamri 18, Nur Shazreen Munazli 19, 40, Siti Nur Atiqah 20, Intan Sarah Anisah 22)
Bangladesh 1 (Masura Parvin 3)
04/05/18
Bangladesh 0 Vietnam 7 (Do Thi Ngyuen 3, 31, 39, Vo Thi Thuy Trinh 11, 12, Nguyen Thi Thanh 21, Le Thi Thuy Linh 24)
Chinese Taipei 4 (Chen Ya Chun 18 pen, Wang Shu Wen 26, Hsieh Pei Fen 29, Kuo Tsu Erh 32) Malaysia 2 (Siti Asnidah Zamri 5, Zurain Kamarudin 35)
06/05/18
Malaysia 1 (Zurain Kamarudin 19) Vietnam 3 (Do Thi Nguyen 17, Trinh Nguyen Thanh Hang 18, 39)
Chinese Taipei 6 (Akhi Khatun 1 OG, Lin Ha Hui 3, 29, Tang Yung Ching 9, Wang Shi Wen 18, Kuo Tsu Erh 25) Bangladesh 1 (Sabina Khatun 22)

Group C									
	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts	
Japan	3	3	0	0	24	5	19	9	
China	3	2	0	1	15	8	7	6	
Lebanon	3	1	0	2	4	13	-9	3	
Bahrain	3	0	0	3	4	21	-17	0	

03/05/18
China 5 (Li Jingjing 3, Tian Jiao 11, Zhan Huimin 14, Li Yingqing 16, Shen Nan 18) Bahrain 2 (Hessa Al Isa 1, Manar Ebrahim Yaqoob 15)
Japan 5 (Mika Eguchi 2, Masami Kato 8, Anna Amishiro 13, Ryo Egawa 25, Riho Katsumata 31)
Lebanon 1 (Rayane Rachid 15)
05/05/18
Lebanon 0 China 6 (Li jingjing 2, 20, Shen Nan 28, 38, Zhan Huimin 33, Tian Jiao 39)

Bahrain 0 Japan 13 (Eri Wakabayashi 7, 17, 34, Anna Amishiro 10, 28, 37, Ryo Egawa 18, 36, Riho Katsumata 20, Mio Fujita 29, Mika Eguchi 35, Hinako Chida 38, 39)
07/05/18
Japan 6 (Anna Amishiro 4, 32, 40, Ryo Egawa 7, Shiori Nakajima 38, Misato Komura 40) China 4 (Li Yingqing 20, Tian Jiao 24, Wang Ting 39, Li Jingjing 40)
Bahrain 2 (Marwa Mubarak, Eman Al Khattal 15)
Lebanon 3 (Rayane Rachid 3, 10, Yara Hosry 23)

Group D									
	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts	
IR Iran	2	2	0	0	23	2	21	6	
Uzbekistan	2	1	0	1	5	10	-5	3	
Turkmenistan	2	0	0	2	1	17	-16	0	

03/05/18
Turkmenistan 0 Iran 14 (Fatemeh Etedadi 1, 12, 35, 38, Fahimeh 5, 6, 40, Fereshteh Karimi 8, 16, 23, Fatemeh Papi 16, Seyedehnastaran Moghimidarsi 18, Arezoo Sadaghianizadeh 24, Sara Shirbeigi 32)
05/05/18
Uzbekistan 3 (Zumratjon Nazarova 17, Rushaniya Safina 19, Malika Burkonova 23) Turkmenistan 1 (Halida Esnyyazova 40)
07/05/18
Iran 9 (Tanzilya Zarbieva 1 OG, Sara Shirbeigo 2, 24, 32, Fereshteh Karimi 3, Fatemeh Etedadi 10, 34, Fatemeh Arzhangi 25, Fereshteh Khosravi 40)
Uzbekistan 2 (Rushaniya Safina 30, Maftuna Shoyimova 38)

Quarter-Finals

09/05/18
Iran 4 (Fereshteh Karimi 2, Nasimeh Gholami 16, Fatemeh Etedadi 21, Sara Shirbeigi 37) China 2 (Tian Jiao 3, Zhang Yue 9)
Japan 5 (Anna Amishiro 15, Ryo Egawa 21, Junko Yokoyama 26, Shiori Nakajima 28, Saki Yotsui 33)
Uzbekistan 1 (Rushaniya Safina 36)
Vietnam 2 (Nguyen Thi Trang 13, Nguyen Thi Hue 37) Indonesia 1 (Febriana Kusumanungrum 25)
Thailand 6 (Darika Peanpailun 17, Sasicha Phothiwong 23, Jiraprapa Tupsiri 23, Mutita Senkram 32, 34, 39) Chinese Taipei 1 (Chen Pin Hui 19)

Semi-Finals

10/05/18
Vietnam 0 Iran 5 (Arezoo Sadaghianizadeh 5, Fatemeh Etedadi 10, 37, Sara Shirbeigi 14, Fahimeh Zarei 16)
Thailand 1 (Jenjira Bubpha 30) Japan 2 (Ryo Egawa 5, Masami Kato 33)

Third-Place Play-off

12/05/18
Thailand 0
Vietnam 0
Thailand win 3-2 on penalties

Final

12/05/18
Japan 2 (Mika Eguchi 31, Anna Amishiro 40)
Iran 5 (Sara Shirbeigi 27, 30, 31, Misato Komura 30 OG, Fahimeh Zarei 36)



Inaugural AFC South Zone Media & Coms Workshop Held

Representatives from the AFC's South Zone Member Associations (MA) met in Kuala Lumpur in May to update their communications skills at the first AFC Media & Communications workshop targeted to the South region.

The workshop provided the participants an opportunity to learn through practical sessions and real-life examples, as well as offering a strategic approach to help grow the game in the South Zone MAs. The AFC organised the event in participation with the UEFA Assist Programme.

All seven MAs were represented, and the participants played an active role throughout the two days, especially at the practical session which kicked off the second day of the workshop. Media relations, operations and content creation were covered through press conference and

mixed zone simulations where the participants could try their hand at interviewing and acting as AFC or team media officers.

The importance of planning was highlighted throughout, and the first session of the workshop concentrated on how to create a communications strategy and why having one was vital.

Other topics covered included campaign marketing, national team branding and digital content creation. The participants discussed the "tone of voice" that should be used by the federation when communicating with their

fans, as well as with other stakeholder groups.

Fan engagement was another topic which was underlined throughout the two days, and with the growing importance of social media, addressing fans directly is now the most effective way to spread football to new audiences.



AFC Women's Club Competition Recommended

The Asian Football Confederation Women's Football Committee have agreed on the importance of the introduction of a women's club competition in Asia after a meeting ahead of the AFC Women's Asian Cup Jordan 2018 final in Amman.

The AFC Technical Division submitted views on the introduction of a women's club competition. It was concluded that a good quality club competition will be vital in closing the gap between the top teams and the next tier of Member Associations, a key objective for the AFC's women's football development strategy.

The format and timing of the Women's Olympic Asian Qualifiers was also reviewed by the Committee, based on survey feedback received from the Member Associations. Twenty-eight AFC Member Associations have entered the Women's Olympic Football Tournament Tokyo 2020 competition.

The first round of qualifiers will involve five groups comprising four teams and the second round will involve three groups of four teams. Both will be played in a centralised format.

After discussion on the merits of centralised and home-and-away fixtures, the Committee agreed to

centralised groups, with the play-off matches to be played on a home-and-away basis between the top two teams of each group. The AFC Competitions Division was mandated to find the most suitable dates for the qualifiers.



AFC And Special Olympics Asia Pacific To Partner

The Asian Football Confederation and Special Olympics Asia Pacific (SOAP) have signed a three-year Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to promote social inclusion through football across Asia.

The partnership will see the two organisations deliver football development programmes for athletes with intellectual disabilities in the Asia Pacific region. The MoU between the AFC and SOAP is built around the shared objectives and common commitment to raise awareness of the capabilities of athletes with intellectual disabilities and increase their access to sport and football.

The AFC will provide access to its technical resources to sports directors and volunteer coaches from Special Olympics Asia Pacific programmes in the countries

where the AFC has Member Associations.

This expertise will strengthen the football infrastructure of the Special Olympics Asia Pacific programmes through ongoing development opportunities for coaches,

referees and other officials, increasing access to competitions and utilising the expertise of local football communities.

The culmination of the partnership will be the annual Asian Football Week, to be launched in 2019. Targeting at least 20,000 football players annually and organised in over 20 countries, the event will comprise week-long football tournaments,

training clinics and 'unified sports' where people with and without intellectual disabilities play together.

Overall, the Asian Football Week will be a platform to raise awareness of social inclusion through football.



AFC President Pledges Support to Kuwait FA

Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa visited Kuwait in early June to meet with the Kuwait FA President Shaikh Ahmad Yousef Al Sabah and the members of the recently elected KFA board.

The AFC President confirmed that the AFC will provide the support and assistance required for the newly elected FA board to achieve its goals and he asked the board to provide unity so that the hopes of Kuwaiti football family can be realised.

Shaikh Salman said: "Asian football remembers the impact of Kuwaiti football at the continental level, through the results of national teams and clubs and development of several great stars."

"We are very confident that Kuwaiti football can regain its position at the continental level

looking at the resources it has combined with the strong desire to work hard to develop the game."

The AFC President also heard the plans and strategies set by the Kuwait FA board, and he congratulated the Kuwait FA President and members on their ideas and determination to raise the level of the game in the future.

Sheikh Ahmed Al Yousef Al Sabah welcomed the AFC President in Kuwait, and explained that this visit reflected Shaikh Salman's desire to continue the open communication with the Asian football family.

He added this helped identify the challenges Member Associations face.

The Kuwait FA President stressed that the newly elected board will draw up plans and deliver programmes to achieve the Kuwaiti football family's goals of developing the game at all levels.



MAs Benefit From Refereeing Administration Support

The third edition of the ongoing AFC Member Associations Refereeing Administration Project saw the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) complete its third visit at the end of June.

The third edition of the project, which aims to enhance and sustain Member Associations' refereeing administration development, will build on the success of the recently concluded second edition, a two-year programme which benefitted Hong Kong, Kyrgyz Republic, Malaysia and Saudi Arabia.

Among the achievements realised by BFF were The Referees Committee which has been restructured and its members were assigned clearly-defined roles and responsibilities; the concept of having a subcommittee system has been introduced; a specific refereeing development plan has been designed; and a solid

channel for communication with the local football associations has been established through assigned refereeing development officers.

Various aspects for BFF's future development of referees were further discussed, including the reinforcement of the Referees Department by the recruitment of necessary specialists, the development of technical instructors in order to increase the number of refereeing courses as well as the participation of BFF match officials in the AFC elite panel recruitment and AFC Referee Academy programme.

The other nations who participate alongside BFF in the project's third batch are China, Laos, Palestine and Singapore, which fall under the AFC Referees Department, while Indonesia, Maldives, Tajikistan and Thailand are part of the AFC President's Initiatives.



AFC To Assist ANFA In Development

Karma Tsering Sherpa, the newly elected President of the All Nepal Football Association (ANFA) met with Asian Football Confederation General Secretary Dato' Windsor John at AFC house in late May to discuss the rejuvenation of football in Nepal.

Sherpa was accompanied by ANFA Vice President Pankaj Bikram Nembang and General Secretary Indar Man Tuladhar at the meeting in which he outlined to Dato' Windsor John and AFC Directors the challenges facing football in Nepal.

Dato Windsor John told Mr Sherpa "We are happy to welcome the ANFA delegation to AFC House, the home of Asian football.

"Nepal is an important football country in the AFC South Zone and has been a member since 1971 and we

look forward to working with ANFA and assisting in the future development of the game in the country."

Dato' Windsor added that the AFC has been encouraged by the announcement that the Nepal League will restart this year as "league football is the heartbeat of the game in any country".

The AFC General Secretary also pledged support for the ANFA programme of restarting the league and in the determination to develop the game at

the grassroots as well as bringing in technical support for players, coaches and referees.

The ANFA President thanked the AFC for their support and added: "We face some big challenges in Nepal. We are asking the AFC for support in the area of grassroots, facilities as well as technical advancement."



AFC And FIFA Presidents Discuss Cooperation

The Asian Football Confederation President Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa met with his FIFA counterpart Gianni Infantino during the FIFA President's visit to Bahrain in May.

They discussed further cooperation between the AFC and FIFA at all levels, and the possible ways to strengthen the relationship in order to achieve the joint goals of developing the game and providing support for Member Associations in Asia.

Shaikh Salman congratulated Infantino on keeping an open relationship with all global game stakeholders and stressed the role of FIFA and its leadership to achieve the success.

The AFC President explained the AFC's future plans to continue developing football in Asia and to establish the AFC as a leader among other confederations.

Shaikh Salman confirmed the AFC's support in efforts to maintain unity in the global football family, as it is important for maintaining FIFA's role in developing the world game in an efficient and transparent way.

The AFC President also supported the continuation of

the reform process, which he said was crucial in keeping the fans on side.

On the other side, Infantino thanked the AFC President for the reception, and hailed the AFC's efforts to develop the game in Asia, confirming that FIFA will continue to work with the AFC to achieve common goals.



AFC Grassroots Football Day 2018 Sets New Record

The Asian Football Confederation's ambition, under its Vision and Mission, to grow the popularity of football across the continent marked a significant milestone in mid-May as a record 41 Member Associations (MAs) pledged to celebrate the AFC Grassroots Football Day 2018.

The latest achievement demonstrated the continued progress of the grassroots movement in Asia with a new participation record set every year since the AFC Grassroots Football Day was inaugurated in 2013.

One of the key highlights this year has been the diversity and depth of activities being planned and organised by the AFC Member Associations, further underlining the AFC's grassroots philosophy of encouraging mass participation for all, providing more opportunities for social inclusion, supporting healthy lifestyles and the development of young people, both in sporting and educational aspects.

At the forefront of innovation and inclusion, Guam

Football Association organised a competition for mothers for the first time. The Korea Football Association, meanwhile, will be deepening its engagements through the staging of football experience camps for children living in rural

communities.

The 2018 edition has also seen the return of the Pakistan Football Federation, who will be organising several youth and grassroots competitions and training camps, as well as the Afghanistan Football Federation, who have hosted a three-day course for aspiring grassroots coaches in the South Asian nation.



Kashima Soccer Stadium

Kashima, Japan



ome of J.League giants Kashima Antlers, Kashima Soccer Stadium is located just a few kilometres outside the city of Kashima, in Japan's Ibaraki prefecture.

Construction on the venue began in early 1992 and was completed just over a year later, before the stadium officially opened in May 1993 – the same year professional

football was introduced in Japan – with a friendly between Kashima Antlers and Brazilian team Fluminense.

Kashima Soccer Stadium was among Japan's first football-specific venues and initially had a capacity of 15,000, but in the build-up to the 2002 FIFA World Cup it underwent major renovations and the capacity was increased to 40,728.

Prior to the World Cup, all three of Brazil's group stage matches at the 2001 FIFA Confederations Cup were held at the venue,

including a 0-0 draw with Japan.

During the global showpiece, the stadium hosted three high-profile group matches – Argentina vs Nigeria, Germany vs Republic of Ireland and Italy vs Croatia – in what was the first World Cup to be staged in Asia.

Since then, Kashima have enjoyed considerable success at Kashima Soccer Stadium, including three successive J.League titles between 2007 and 2009, while the venue also hosts the side's AFC Champions League matches.



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“One of the things I always dream of is winning the Asian Cup with Iran. That’s one thing that hasn’t happened for a long time now.”

Alireza Jahanbakhsh

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